# TRIGGER BERG AND HIS 700 MOUSE TRAPS

BY LEO EDWARDS

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# TRIGGER BERG AND HIS 700 MOUSE TRAPS

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DYNAMITE PUT SLATS OVER THE ALLEY FENCE.

*Trigger Berg and his 700 Mouse Traps.* *Frontispiece* (*Page* 56)

# TRIGGER BERG
## AND HIS
# 700 MOUSE TRAPS

BY

LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE ANDY BLAKE BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY

BERT SALG

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TO

MY PAL

BOB BILLINGS

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# LEO EDWARDS' BOOKS

Here is a complete list of Leo Edwards' published books:

## THE JERRY TODD SERIES

Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy
Jerry Todd and the Rose-Colored Cat
Jerry Todd and the Oak Island Treasure
Jerry Todd and the Waltzing Hen
Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog
Jerry Todd and the Purring Egg
Jerry Todd in the Whispering Cave
Jerry Todd, Pirate
Jerry Todd and the Bob-Tailed Elephant
Jerry Todd, Editor-in-Grief

## THE POPPY OTT SERIES

Poppy Ott and the Stuttering Parrot
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Poppy Ott and the Galloping Snail
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Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps

The following titles are in preparation:

Jerry Todd, Caveman
Poppy Ott Hits the Trail
Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig

# TRIGGER BERG AND HIS 700 MOUSE TRAPS

## CHAPTER I

### THE LITTLE WHITE BUREAU

July 25—My pa is in bed to-night with a lame back. He also has a big lump on the top of his bald head. It's the same kind of a lump that I had on the top of my head the time I got socked with a baseball bat.

Friday did it, though, of course, he didn't mean to. For he's one of my best pals. And pals as loyal as we are don't, as a rule, sock each other with baseball bats or any other kind of bats.

When I tell you that Friday's real name is Ronald Fish you can understand easily enough why the kids in our block (I live in Crocketville, Illinois) call him Friday. For, of course, on Friday you always get fish! Pretty keen, huh?

Another good pal of mine of the same age is John Beale, whose nickname is Slats. We call him that because he's so skinny. There's nothing skinny, though, about his kid brother, Bob. I like Slats the best. But when we organized a Comet Coaster club last June, as written down in the first volume of my diary, we couldn't very well leave Bob out.

I'm the captain of our club; Slats is the assistant captain; and Friday and Tail Light (which is the nickname that we have for Bob, because, being the smallest, he always tags behind) are just members.

We have weekly meetings in Friday's barn, which is all fixed up swell with soap boxes for seats and a cow's skull hung over the door. For a Bible to do our swearing on (every club, you know, has its secrets that the members must swear to keep) we have an old doctor book, which, for our purpose, is just as good as a Bible. The part that we kiss when we do the swearing shows a man having his insides cut out. Friday colored the picture beautifully with red ink to make it look like blood. Then, too, we have odd bones hung here and there. We found the most of them in a gully behind the cemetery. And I've often wondered if

some of them aren't human bones. I hope so. It would be swell to own the jawbone or the wishbone of some old settler.

If you have read the other part of my diary (called volume No. 1) you already know about our rat-catching scheme. We thought that we were going to get rich catching rats and mice in Crocketville, which is a small town of about five hundred houses. Calling ourselves the Crocketville Sanitary Rat Killer Company (I was the Treasurer, Slats the General Manager, Friday the Secretary and Tail Light the Advertising Manager), it was our scheme to leave the traps in the different houses, charging a cent apiece for each rat and mouse that we caught. Figuring ten rats and mice per house per week (which would be ten times five hundred), we sort of looked forward to earning not less than fifty dollars a week. And, of course, if we averaged twenty mice and rats per house per week, a very reasonable number, we'd earn a hundred dollars. Which, you probably will agree with me, is big stuff for small boys.

But did we earn one hundred dollars a week? Or, stepping down a peg, did we earn fifty dollars a week? Or, stepping down still an-

other peg, did we earn ten dollars a week? I'll tell the world we didn't!

If you must know the whole disappointing truth we didn't earn a single penny. And now we have seven hundred mouse traps on our hands (which cost us an even fourteen bucks, or two cents apiece) and a hunk of stale cheese as big as Friday's head.

Cheese is good to lunch on. But a fellow can't eat stale cheese like ours. No, sir, that cheese (thank heaven we got it at a bargain!) is a total loss. As for the mouse traps, we'll be lucky if we ever get our money out of them. Fourteen bucks! Just think how you'd feel if you were joint owner of fourteen bucks and it was all tied up in mouse traps. Even worse, think how you'd feel if the neighbors were all sore at you, as the Crocketville women are at us, chiefly Mrs. Diccup, who shook me by the shirt collar until my teeth rattled, as I have written down, simply because I put a few little mice into her house.

I'm sick of mice. And I'm sick of rats. And I'm sick of stale cheese. If a kid anywhere near my size says "rats" to me I'll sock him on the beezer, and I don't mean maybe.

Which, however, has nothing to do with my

pa's lame back, as mentioned in the start-off of my new diary. I'll tell you what happened. You see, about every month or two my ma gets a notion in her head to clean house. And this time (meaning to-day) she had all of the furniture taken out of the big front bedroom so that the paper hanger, who is coming to-morrow morning to put new paper on the walls and ceiling, could have the whole room to himself. The bedstead and dresser were piled in the hall near the bathroom door. But the little white bureau, my ma said, as she kind of bossed the moving job, could be taken to the basement and used to keep tools in such as saws and hammers. It would be a blessing, she said, not to have such things scattered all over the house.

So my pa kind of hoisted the little white bureau onto his broad back and started, wabbly-kneed, down the stairs. House cleaning, he grumbled, was a blamed nuisance. And he didn't see any sense in lugging bureaus upstairs and downstairs. If he ever got married again, he said, he was going to make the preacher put it in the marriage ceremony that there was to be no house cleaning except when he was away from home on business trips.

He started to say something else, too. But he didn't finish it. For just then he kind of stumbled. Gee! There was an awful clatter as the little white bureau and my poor pa galloped down the stairs, sort of fighting it out between them, first one bobbing to the top and then the other. My ma screamed. For she was afraid, I guess, that my pa and the little white bureau would scratch the varnish. Then there was a dull thud as the little white bureau kind of cornered my poor tuckered-out pa at the foot of the stairs and straddled his neck. My ma and I ran to the rescue. And between us we helped my poor pa to bed.

In addition to the paper hanger my ma is going to hire a carpenter to repair the stair railing, which needs seven new spindles. And she may have to hire a plasterer, too, as there is a big dent in the wall where my poor pa and the little white bureau flew around the bend.

This afternoon my pa and I had quite a talk about my unsuccessful rat-catching venture.

"Didn't you realize, Trigger," says he, calling me by my nickname (my real name is Henry Berg), "that you were doing wrong when you put those mice in Mrs. Diccup's house?"

"Sure thing," I admitted frankly.

"Then why did you do it?"

"Oh! . . . We were feeling kind of desperate, I guess."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, we had the mouse traps on our hands. And we wanted to get our money out of them."

"Suppose you had succeeded in your scheme," he followed up. "Don't you realize that your conscience would have troubled you every time you accepted a penny from those women?"

I saw what he meant.

"I'm sorry I did it," I told him. And I *was* sorry, too, as he could see by my actions.

So he quit talking about it. Nor did I tell him how worried I was over those mouse traps. Seven hundred mouse traps! What *can* a fellow do with seven hundred mouse traps? As for the stale cheese, Slats being the one who suggested the crazy scheme in the first place, I'd like to cram the stinking cheese down his throat.

Bu-lieve me, I'll think twice hereafter before I say "yes" to any of his crazy schemes. Still, we came out slick on that "pirate" scheme of his. And I should be thankful, I suppose, that he didn't spend our whole two hundred dollars

for mouse traps—two hundred dollars, you know, being the amount of the reward that we got for catching the robber.

Oh, yes, I want to mention a new book that I'm reading. It's another one of those "Jerry Todd" books and the title is *Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog.*

There's an absent-minded old inventor in the story. And is he ever a nut! One time he went to church with his slippers on. And another time at breakfast he absent-mindedly scratched his buckwheat pancake and poured syrup down the back of his neck. I like Aunt Polly. She's keen. And Tom Ricks (the son of the pancake scratcher) is a swell kid. Mr. Ricks has invented a radio toy called a talking frog. A crooked Chicago firm is trying to steal the invention. I hope they get left. For I'd hate to see Mr. Ricks lose his invention.

Tom says in the story that he and his pa and Aunt Polly (boy, she's some long-distance talker!) are poor. But they won't be poor if Mr. Ricks can sell his invention. I hope he does sell it. Jerry and his gang are going to help Tom. I'd help him, too, if I had the chance. For, as I say, he's a swell kid. Slats, who read the book last week, tells me that

there's a ghost in it and an old gee-whacker of a mystery. I like ghosts and mysteries. Maybe I'll come to the ghost and mystery part to-morrow night.

I'll now have to put away my diary and rub some liniment on my pa's back, my ma having appointed me nurse. It's fun to wait on my pa. For I love him just as much as he loves me. I love my ma, too. I sure have a swell pa and ma. They scold me when I get into scrapes. But, at that, I guess I don't get any more scoldings than I deserve.

(Later.) My pa fired me. I'm a punk nurse, he said. For I got the furniture polish bottle by mistake. You see, it was some green furniture polish that my ma had poured into an old liniment bottle. So I wasn't so much to blame. Anyway, it didn't take any skin off—just turned it green a little bit. I'm glad it didn't loosen the skin. I'd hate to think that my pa had lost his skin on my account.

July 26—My pa is feeling much better to-day. When I'm sick he usually buys me ice cream. So this afternoon I bought him an ice cream cone, which melted when I was bringing

it home. So I had to lick the outside of the cone. But he got all the rest.

Mr. Simon Burt (whose nickname is Perpetual Motion) came to our house to-day with his stepladders, paste kettle and other paper-hanging truck. The men call him Perpetual Motion because he keeps his mouth going all the time. I used to think he chewed a cud like a cow. But I've been told that it's just a nervous habit. His mouth, with the exception of the stuff that belongs in there, is entirely empty. Yet he constantly chews and chews and chews. I should think his jaws would get tired. But he's a good paper hanger.

To-day he papered the two side walls and ceiling of our front bedroom. Friday and I watched him. But he gave us a boot down the stairs when we started flipping hunks of gooey paste at each other. Then what do you know if little Tail Light didn't back up and sit down in the hot paste kettle! Gee! His ma made him wear his bathing suit and a plaster this afternoon while she soaked his pants in a tub of water. As for old Perpetual Motion, he says the first kid who sticks his mug over the stair railing is going to get socked with a roll of wall paper.

I bet I could hang wall paper. For all he does is spread paste on the back of the paper and slam it on the wall. He earns five bucks a day, too. I half believe that I'd like to be a paper hanger when I grow up.

## CHAPTER II

### POSIES AND PEACOCKS

JULY 27—Old Perpetual Motion is working in our back bedroom to-day. And all of the furniture from the front and back bedrooms is piled in the hall. You never saw such a mess. I could hardly squeeze into my room to-night. It's like climbing mountains.

At the supper table my ma mentioned the possibility of company dropping in on us.

"It would be my luck," says she wearily.

"Did I tell you," says my pa, "that I had a card last Monday from my brother Ben? He's on his way home from San Francisco."

"*Him?*" says my ma, acting as though her appetite had suddenly slipped away from her. "Goodness gracious! Let's hope he forgets where we live."

"What's the matter with Ben?" says my pa, kind of stiff-like.

"He's too rich to suit me."

"Meaning which?" says my pa.

"He has everything that money can buy. His home in New York City is like a palace."

"We have a good home," says my pa.

"Of course. And if I wasn't in the midst of house cleaning I'd have you wire Ben to be sure and stop over and see us. But I don't want him now. For I have no place to put him, as you know."

I like my Uncle Ben. For I have oodles of ice cream and licorice when he's around. All I've got to do is to look hungry in front of an ice cream parlor or candy store and he promptly takes the hint. Which shows you how smart he is. I've heard my ma say that his book-publishing business has earned a million dollars. The next time I see him I'm going to ask him about his business. For I wouldn't want to be a paper hanger all my life if I could make more money publishing books.

Speaking of books, I'm halfway through the *Talking Frog* book. And is it ever a darb! A spy is trying to steal the talking frog. And the boys, in the absence of Aunt Polly and Mr. Ricks, have buried the clever invention in the cellar floor.

I think they're dumb. I'd put the frog in a bank vault if it were me. I'd know then that it was safe. With Mr. Ricks and Aunt Polly on their way to Washington to record the inventor's drawings in the patent office, it sure would be tough to have the spy step in ahead of them. And that is what would happen, all right, if the hidden geezer ever got his thieving hands on the buried invention.

Old Mrs. Camel told me to-day that she would like to have her sitting room papered, like our spare bedrooms, if she could afford it. The poor old lady! After all the swell things that she has done for me, bringing me red jelly when I had the measles and forcing cookies on me, I sure would like to paper her sitting room for her. By using some of the old wall paper stored in our attic it wouldn't cost her a cent, either.

Earlier in my diary I told about the little low-roofed cottage that she lives in near the creek, where she supports herself by taking in family washings. And because that is hard work for an old lady, I frequently stop in and twist the tail of her old-fashioned washing machine, which explains why she is so fond of me and so liberal with her cookies.

July 28—We had a lot of excitement in Sunday School to-day. Slats choked on a bug. You should have heard him gag. Everybody in the church stared at him. And did the kids ever laugh! But Slats didn't laugh. I wonder what would happen if a fellow swallowed a bumblebee or a hornet. Gee! I bet a hornet would make a fellow gag.

July 29—To-day is Monday. And was my ma ever provoked when old Perpetual Motion failed to show up. I thought maybe he had worn out the hinges of his jaws and was slowly starving to death. But when I went over to his house to inquire about him I was told by his wife, who was fixing up a boiled dinner for him, that he had a bad case of rheumatism. He might not be able to finish our job for several days, she said.

Which, however, is a big piece of luck for me. For now I can kind of borrow his stuff and do Mrs. Camel's paper hanging for her. She told me to-day, when I kind of quizzed around, that pink is her favorite color. But for that matter, she added, never dreaming, of course, what I had in my mind, she would

gladly put up with any kind of sitting-room wall paper if it were new and clean. Beggars, she said, shouldn't be choosers. So now, having determined to do the papering for her, I'm going to pick out some pretty pink patterns from the wall paper in the attic, which is extra rolls that my ma put away for patching purposes but which never were used. Friday and Slats are going to help me. As for Tail Light, the less we see of him the better, for he usually upsets things.

This afternoon while my ma and my pa were trying out a new automobile I gave old Perpetual Motion's paste kettle and other truck a short ride on my Comet Coaster. So now, having unloaded the stuff in Mrs. Camel's house, we're all set for business.

Mrs. Camel is visiting in the country, having left instructions for me to feed her geese and empty her cookie jar. I can imagine how pleased she'll be when she sees the nice pink wall paper that I have picked out for her. It was kind of disappointing to me that no two rolls were alike. But she told me herself that she didn't care what the paper looked like just so it was new and clean.

July 30—I found out to-day that paper hanging is lots harder than it looks. It's blamed tiresome work, in fact. More than that, it's blamed uncertain work. One minute you think you have it; and the next minute you find your hunk of wabbly wall paper draped on a cupboard, or something.

If we could have turned the house upside down everything would have been lovely. For then we could have papered the ceiling as easily as unrolling a rug. We spent hours on that crazy ceiling. And if you could see it you'd say, all right, that the guys who papered it were crazy. Still, it's the best we can do.

As compared with the ceiling job the walls were a cinch. In fact, by putting the goo on the wall, instead of on the back of the paper (our own idea), we found that it was no trick at all. But that ceiling! No wonder I have a crook in my neck. It'll be an even greater wonder if I ever get the crook out of my neck.

Mrs. Camel called up this morning to inquire about her geese. I was to give them plenty of feed, she said. And if the cookies ran out before she got home she'd see that I got my pay in jaw-breakers.

Boy, she sure is going to be tickled when she

sees how nice and clean her sitting room is. Of course, the furniture isn't very clean, for we had hard work removing the fallen wall paper. But the walls are beautiful. And so sort of distinctive. I get tired of looking at the same old wall-paper pattern in my room. But Mrs. Camel will never get tired of looking at her wall paper. For she has at least twenty different patterns to look at. This is the distinctive part of the job.

After talking with her over the telephone, as I say, I beat it for Friday's house.

"This is our lucky day," says I.

"Meaning which?" says he.

"Mrs. Camel won't be home till to-morrow afternoon," says I.

"Where is she?" says he.

"Visiting relatives in the country," says I.

"And is it your scheme," says he, "to paper her sitting room while she's away?"

"Why not?" says I. "It'll be fun to surprise her."

"And you think she'll like the paper we picked out?"

"Sure thing."

"The room is going to look funny," says he, "with a different pattern in each corner."

"You know what she told me," says I. "Any kind of paper, she said, would satisfy her if it were new and clean."

So, with Slats in tow, we legged it to the little cottage on the creek bank and got busy. Later Tail Light stuck his nose in the door. And when he got fresh we locked him in the poultry house with the geese. Boy, did he ever squawk! But the geese squawked the loudest, so no one heard him.

It would be nice, Slats said, letting on that he was a good judge of such things, to use stripes near the windows and doors. So, to please him, we picked out suitable pink patterns, sort of blending the pink stripes into baskets of pink flowers, and things like that. As I say, the walls were easy. But that *ceiling!* Oh, oh! The first piece that came down draped itself on Friday. We almost had to use a can opener on him to find him. Then Slats got a dose of it. But we persevered, as the saying is. And now the job is all done.

I had intended to-night to read another chapter in my *Talking Frog* book. But I'm too tired. So as soon as I put away my diary I'm going to jump into bed.

(Later.) Slats just came in on the run to

tell me that Tail Light either has run away from home or someone has eloped with him. His ma is having cat fits.

(Still later.) They just found Tail Light sound asleep in the poultry house.

July 31—Whoopee! My Uncle Ben is here. He came in at noon and surprised us. He's going to sleep with me, too. First my ma said that he could have my bed and I would sleep on a cot in the hall. But he wouldn't listen to that. The bed was big enough for us both, he declared. As for one sleeper kicking the other, if I got a kick in the ribs, he said, grinning at me kind of chummy-like, I was to kick back as hard as I could. And if I kicked him out of the bed *that* was all right, too.

So you can see what a peachy guy *he* is. He brought me a big box of candy and a tin snake which crawls along the floor just as natural as anything. I was interested when he told me that his company publishes the "Jerry Todd" books. And he has promised to send me the whole set, together with some similar books that the author has written about a boy named Poppy Ott.

As long as my Uncle Ben was so nice and chummy with me, telling me that I could kick him out of the bed and everything, I thought I ought to be equally chummy with him. So I told him about my wall-paper secret. I think he was kind of surprised. He looked surprised. And when I took him over to Mrs. Camel's house, to show him the completed job, he looked kind of dizzy.

"My word!" says he, sort of staring in turn at the different pink patterns. "My word!"

"It's very unusual," I told him.

"Yes," says he. "It's decidedly unusual."

"Notice that strip with the pink peacocks in it," says I.

"Beautiful," says he, in the same queer tone of voice.

"And see the baskets of pink roses," I further pointed.

He admitted that the pink roses were as beautiful as the pink peacocks.

"And you say you did it yourself?" says he, looking around.

"Friday and Slats helped me," I admitted.

"Are they older than you?"

"No, sir," I shook my head. "We're all the same age."

"Fancy," says he, sort of speaking to himself, "three boys in knee pants tackling a job like this. It's almost unbelievable."

"The ceiling," I told him, "was the hardest part."

He looked up.

"My word!" says he again. "My word!"

"I wouldn't have done it for anybody but Mrs. Camel," I told him, when we were outside. "But she's a particular friend of mine."

"Trigger," says he, when we were headed for home, "you're a manly little fellow. And I want you to know that I'm very proud of you, my lad."

A boy can stand a lot of that kind of talk.

"Not many youngsters of your size," he added, "would take time from their play to help an old lady crank her washing machine. And I can only hope that she will see the nobility in this latest good turn of yours."

The meaning of which, I'll have to admit, was a trifle vague to me. But I didn't shove in any questions. For least of all did I want him to think that I was a dumb-bell.

My ma was having a fit when I went into the house, my Uncle Ben having continued down the street in the direction of the business sec-

tion where the stores and public garages are.

"Trigger," she pounced onto me, "is it true that you and the boys have been messing around in Mrs. Camel's house with wall paper?"

Messing around!

"We papered her sitting room," says I, with the proper dignity.

"You . . . *what?*"

"Papered her sitting room," I repeated.

"Oh, oh!" says my ma, sinking into a chair, from which she looked at me as though I had dropped into something that she couldn't pull me out of. "This is awful."

And then, can you imagine it, she started scolding me for doing a good turn. The neighbors who peeked into Mrs. Camel's sitting room through the windows, she said, had laughed themselves sick. But it was no laughing matter to her. It was a tragedy. And I was the fly in the ointment, or whatever the old saying is. You've heard it, I'm sure.

"Oh," she took on, "how *could* you do such a thing? How *could* you?"

"The ceiling," I told her, "was the hardest part."

"Suppose," says my pa, who had been

gravely taking in the side-show, "that we go over to the old lady's house and see for ourselves how the ceiling looks. Maybe we'll be pleasantly surprised."

"Uncle Ben admits," says I, "that it's beautiful—especially the pink peacocks."

"Oh!" squealed my ma. "Keep still. If you don't, I'll lose my mind."

Then, who should show up in the doorway but old Mrs. Camel herself, my Uncle Ben having brought her home in a hired automobile.

"No," says the old lady, when my ma and my pa began apologizing about the wall paper. "Don't ye say a word ag'in it. Not a single word, mind ye. 'Tis beautiful. And proud I am to have the affection of a b'y like yours. Come, Trigger," she opened her arms. "I want to give ye a hug. Ah, ye little scallawag! Ye may niver be a successful paper hanger. But ye have in ye the makings of a noble man."

Well, there was a lot more talk. But I don't know as it's necessary to write it down. I overheard my pa whisper something to my ma about a two-hundred-dollar check. And I understand that Mrs. Camel is going to spend some of the money for a new roof. But I don't see why my ma and my pa should get the silly

notion that the two hundred dollars came from my rich Uncle Ben. For why should *he* give Mrs. Camel two hundred dollars? That doesn't make sense to me.

## CHAPTER III

### GETTING READY FOR EGGBERT

August 1—I'm the luckiest kid in seventeen states. I guess I am! For what do you know if my Uncle Ben hasn't promised to make a book out of my first diary! A *real* book, mind you, with a colored cover and inside pictures and everything. When I complete my second diary (which is the one I'm writing in now) he's going to make a book out of that one, too. And I'm going to get a royalty! Just think of that! A royalty, you know, is pay. And I'm going to get a royalty on each and every book that my Uncle Ben sells.

Here's how it happened:

I turned in first last night, soon falling asleep. But after a bit I kind of woke up. And when I got the sleep pinched out of my eyes there sat my Uncle Ben in his green pajamas reading my first diary, which I keep on a table beside my bed. He'd read a line or two and

then he'd chuckle. Then he'd read another line or two and chuckle some more.

"My word!" says he, when he came to the part where my chums and I got hung up with the seven hundred mouse traps. "It's the funniest thing I ever read in all my life. And I wondered at him papering that room! A boy of *his* age! That, though, is nothing as compared to some of this other truck. The little scallawag! I have a notion to publish his diary. And why not? I could get Leo Edwards to whip it into shape. And it would please Trigger, I imagine, to split royalties with a man like Mr. Edwards."

"Boo!" says I, to let him know that I was awake. And then we sat side by side on the edge of the bed, just like pals, while he told me how interesting my diary was and how Leo Edwards, the writer of the "Jerry Todd" books, would be tickled pink to put the diary in shape for publication.

"What will he do to it?" says I curiously, scarcely realizing my good fortune.

"Well," says my Uncle Ben, "he probably will correct a few misspelled words here and there, and kind of check up on the punctuation."

So there you are! And you can see how lucky I am. An *author,* mind you! Trigger Berg, author! If it were Slats I dare say he would get stuck-up about it. But I don't feel a bit stuck-up. I hope, though, that Mr. Crump, our newspaper man, will be liberal with his type when he prints his first article about me. It will be a whole lot nicer to be mentioned in his newspaper as an author than to be advertised as a sanitary rat catcher.

Now that I'm an author I'm not at all worried over those mouse traps. Poof! For what is a part interest in fourteen dollars' worth of mouse traps to an author like me? A mere drop in the bucket. Still, it *would* be kind of nice if we could get our money back. Not that I need the money! No, indeed. But I would like to show the neighbors who laughed at us so smart-like that seven hundred mouse traps couldn't get the best of me.

When my Uncle Ben left for New York City this afternoon he took my first diary with him. And as soon as he has had a talk with Mr. Edwards he's going to write to me.

I wonder if I ought to tell Mr. Crump about me being an author, or let him come to the house to interview me of his own accord?

Trigger Berg, author! Gee!

August 2—I haven't been interviewed yet. But I should worry. There'll be plenty of newspaper men coaxing me for interviews when my book comes out. I wonder if Bert Salg will draw the pictures? I hope so. For his pictures in the "Jerry Todd" books are swell.

And did I ever laugh to-night when I read the *Talking Frog* book! For Jerry and his gang, fearful that the frog might be stolen if left in the cellar of the brick house where the ghost is, carried it to school where it caused an awful commotion. It got into a scrap with the school talking machine—which sounds kind of goofy. For everybody knows that a tin frog and a talking machine couldn't possibly scrap. But the author called it a scrap, with the frog and talking machine sassing each other in turn, to the amazement of the teacher, and socking each other in the seat of the pants. If Mr. Edwards puts a few little touches like that into my diary it won't hurt it any. I kind of hope he does.

Slats came over to my house to-day looking kind of glum.

"Darn the luck," says he, spitting at a grasshopper.

"What's the matter?" says I, showing him

that I was a better spitter than he was. "Are you on your way to the dentist?"

"Even worse than that," says he, "we're going to have company at our house."

"Shucks!" says I, thinking of my Uncle Ben. "Company's fun."

"Not the kind of company we're going to have," says he.

And then, to explain what he meant, he showed me a letter that his ma had just received from a Milwaukee lady.

"You can't imagine how pleased Eggbert was," the letter read in part, "to get your kind invitation. He's perfectly wild to visit you, the more so when I explained to him that Crocketville is situated on the bank of a river. Wait until you see the fishing tackle that he has bought! I feel it is my duty, though, to confide in you that he has a most ungovernable temper. It is hard for me to understand him, for certainly, as you know, his father was one of the gentlest of men. Nor does the temper, so far as I know, come from my side of the house. At times I am bitterly distressed over his silly outbursts. I wish I could make him see himself as others see him. In all except this one fault he is a normal, likable, healthy

boy. So there is no excuse for his actions. Earlier I tried punishment, but with no success. My plan now, when he flares up and starts throwing things, is to ignore him. I might say, too, as a possible suggestion to you in handling him, that I never cross him in anything that he sets out to do if I can possibly avoid it. No doubt, if my husband had lived things would have been different. For a growing boy needs the companionship of a steady, sensible father. I often think of you with two boys of your own. What a responsibility they must be! And to think that I am now adding to that burden! I feel guilty, in a way. But after getting your very kind invitation I doubt if I could keep Eggbert at home or coax him to accompany me on my proposed eastern trip. So look for him (he and your John are about the same age, I believe) on the bus on August the ninth. I will leave for the East the same day. And as soon as I get home I'll wire you."

I laughed as Slats took the letter from me and shoved it into his pocket.

"It'll be fun," says I, "if you and Eggbert get mad at the same time."

"Bu-lieve me," Slats kind of stepped around, "he'll get knocked for a roll if he tries any

of his 'ungovernable temper' stuff on me."

"Who is he, anyway?" says I curiously.

"Oh, his ma and my ma are old friends."

"Then it was your ma," says I, "who invited him to come here?"

"Sure thing."

"She must have had a headache," says I.

"That's what I tell her. But she says it was her duty to invite him, having been told that his mother was going away on a business trip."

I sort of checked over the letter in my mind.

"And so he loves to fish, huh? What are you going to do?" I grinned. "Hire a boat and row him up and down the river?"

A grim look flashed across Slats' face.

"Listen, Trigger, we've got to fix that bird."

"What are you going to do?" I further grinned. "Assassinate him delicately with a butcher knife?—or scatter his cog wheels over the landscape with a shotgun?"

But Slats was too busy with his own thoughts to pay any attention to my nonsense.

"Throws things, does he?" says he, with a hard look in his eyes. "Gets mad, huh, and pitches things. Um . . . I'm not such a rotten pitcher myself."

"I can see, all right," I laughed, "that Eggbert is going to have a lively visit."

Slats then dished out a scheme that had popped into his head.

"Remember," says he, in conclusion. "Like Eggbert I've got a terrible temper. I throw things, too. So whatever you do when you're around me, *don't say pickles.*"

"*Egg*bert!" says I. "Can you imagine a sillier name than that?"

"He's liable to be a scrambled egg," bragged Slats, "before I get through with him. The big boob! Imagine a kid of his age getting mad and throwing things! He's a champion spoiled boy, all right. And as such he needs a good lesson. . . . Are you with me, Trigger?"

"Till Niagara Falls," I grinned.

"Fine!" says he. "And now let's mosey down to the river and line up old Charley."

Everybody in Crocketville knows old Charley Robin. Stooped and gray-haired, with three warts on his nose and a particularly big one on the back of his neck (he calls it his collar button), he earns a skimpy living renting boats and catching fish.

"Howdy, boys," says he, in his friendly way, when we tumbled into his old shack on the

river bank. "Howdy, Trigger. Howdy, Johnny. Jest help yourself to them peanuts over thar an' sit down an' tell me the family news."

"We haven't time to visit," says Slats, kind of crowding me out of the way so that he could get first crack at the peanuts.

"No? Hain't wantin' to rent a boat, be you?" the words were spoken kind of wistfully.

"We might," says Slats.

"Um. . . . Fur fishin'?"

"No," grinned Slats. "For pirate hunting."

The old man stared. Then, when we had told him about Eggbert, and our scheme for curing the spoiled Milwaukee kid of his "ungovernable temper," the boat renter lay back in his easy-chair and cackled till the whole house shook.

"I swan!" says he, letting his big stomach heave up and down. "I swan! If that hain't the beatin'est notion I ever heerd tell of. *Me* impersonate a pirate! Still, I calc'late it kin be done if you boys say so. . . . Figurin' on helpin' me out a bit?" he wound up, kind of crafty-like.

"I guess we can scrape up a dollar or two,"

says Slats. "Besides, Eggbert ought to be a pretty good boat customer. Don't forget about that."

"I swan!" the old man cackled again. "I swan!"

Getting a special two-hour price on a boat we then rowed down the river to Boney Island, where, in a hidden marsh, we had earlier built a secret pirate den of driftwood.

"Hot dog!" says Slats, when, after pushing our boat up the hidden lagoon, we found our shack still standing. "Now we're all set for Eggbert."

## CHAPTER IV

### FURTHER PLANS

August 3—I got a post card this morning from my Uncle Ben.

"I thought you might like to know," he wrote hurriedly, "that I arrived safely in New York City. Nor did I, like old Mr. Ricks in the *Talking Frog* story, misplace my valuable 'papers' on the train. As yet I have been unable to get in touch with the author of the 'Jerry Todd' books. But expect to soon. So it is quite probable that you will receive a somewhat long and favorable letter from me in a few days."

I will be on needles and pins, of course, until I know that everything is all fixed up. And I sure hope that Mr. Edwards doesn't get in front of a loaded garbage truck, like another eastern author that I read about this morning, who, according to the newspaper, had to be

gathered up in a basket. If I knew Mr. Edwards' address I'd write to him and tell him to be careful.

And what if he tells my Uncle Ben that he isn't interested in fixing up small boys' diaries? Gee! I guess it was just as well that I didn't tell Mr. Crump about me being an author. For I'm not sure that I am an author. It all depends on Mr. Edwards.

This morning when I was over to Slats' house I overheard his folks talking about Eggbert, whose ma and Slats' ma grew up together.

"What are you going to do?" says Slats' pa. "Take the hint from your friend's letter and let the kid have everything his own way while he's here?"

"Minnie never was strong-minded," says Slats' ma, speaking her friend's given name. "So I can readily comprehend her helplessness at the death of her husband. Eggbert evidently has been badly spoiled. But that is neither here nor there. Having volunteered to take care of him while his mother's away, the very least we can do is to make his visit happy and memorable."

"It'll be memorable, all right," Slats put in, giving me a wink.

His ma stiffened.

"Let me tell you something, Johnny Beale," says she severely. "Minnie Malcomb and I are old friends. And if you cut up any monkey-shines with her fatherless son while he's under our roof, or aggravate him in any way, I'll use a switch on you. Is that clear to you?"

Slats' face was the picture of injured innocence.

"From the way you go at me," says he, "anybody would think I have no manners at all. He's company. So, of course, in entertaining him I'll use him like company."

Which gave me an idea.

"Let's initiate him into our club," says I eagerly.

"Hot dog!" says Slats, with dancing eyes. "That's a real suggestion."

Slats' pa is full of fun.

"Which reminds me," says he, "of an initiation that I helped to put on when I was a boy. We had a lodge called the Juvenile Templars. Usually a woman presided over our Saturday afternoon meetings, to see that we behaved ourselves. For you know how easily boys and girls can get into mischief! And the hall that we were using was the headquarters

of other lodges, each of which had its own paraphernalia. One afternoon, though, the woman didn't show up. And learning that we had a candidate for initiation—her name was Maggie Stewart—we decided, for once, to use a real goat. Which we did. Boy, oh, boy! We had kidded Maggie about 'riding the goat.' But when she saw that we had a real goat—I think it belonged to Henny Dickman—she almost fell over in a fit. Wanting the initiation to be as exciting as possible, we further made use of a set of wooden axes that we found in the lodge room. It was some procession, let me tell you. Maggie and the goat came first, both dolled up in officers' robes. Next in line came a group of boys bearing wooden axes. Other boys carried Masonic spears. Some of our officers wore Masonic regalia; others wore Modern Woodman regalia; still others wore Odd Fellow regalia. A more colorful and lively initiation I never have witnessed. Alas, though, Maggie was so *thoroughly* initiated that she never came back."

Slats' mouth was stretched from ear to ear.

"And what did the Odd Fellows and the Masons say," says he, "when they found out that you had been using their stuff?"

Mr. Beale's hands went to the seat of his pants.

"My father was the Worshipful Master of the Masonic lodge," he sighed. "In fact, it was *his* robe that we used on the odoriferous goat. Need I say more?"

Odoriferous! He meant that the goat had a bad smell. I knew that, all right.

Later Slats and I took a walk up and down the alley in back of his house where we found an old metal battery box, which, when it is properly touched up with paint, is going to make a swell "treasure chest." When shown the chest, which, of course, will be filled with washers and other junk to make it heavy, old Charley offered to put a padlock on it for us.

"I swan!" cackled the boatman, when we further talked over the details of our scheme. "If it hain't the beatin'est notion I ever heerd tell of. Heh! heh! heh!"

And I can write down to Tail Light's credit that for once in his life he has done something useful. This afternoon when we were playing "Swing-the-gate" in the stockyards, which is a kind of tag game, he crawled into a pig house to hide on us, thinking that the house was

empty. To our good luck, though, he stumbled over an old billy goat, who butted him through the door and halfway across the railroad track. So now we have a goat. Gee! I guess little Eggbert would be tickled pink if he knew of all the swell plans that we are making to entertain him.

When I was over to Slats' house this evening Tail Light was sitting on a pillow. He still had a sort of hunted look in his eyes. We've named the goat Dynamite. And we're going to keep him in Friday's barn.

August 4—Friday's pa is mad as hops. For last night when he went out to the barn in the dark to hang up his fishing boots the goat took after him, which was the first *he* knew that we had a goat. Judging from what Friday told me this morning at Sunday School it was a pretty stiff battle.

August 5—Oh, dear! I'm afraid we're going to lose our goat. In fact, from the way he smells, I suspect that he's more than half dead already. For all he does is lay on his side and

groan. It is such a pitiful groan. And Friday's pa can't find his rubber boots. Do you suppose that fool of a goat ate Friday's pa's rubber boots? I remember seeing them in the barn. But they aren't there now.

August 6—Friday's rubber raincoat is missing, too. And three of Mr. Fish's inner tubes. Evidently Dynamite is a rubber eater. But if we can pull him through he's going to make a swell lodge goat, all right.

(Later.) Friday just came over to tell me that his folks can't find their pump handle. Gosh!

August 7—One time when we were holding a meeting in Friday's barn the neighbor kids, who are envious of us, squirted fish water at us through a big knothole. So to-night, before we opened our meeting, we very sensibly stuffed an old wooden potato masher into the hole.

Tail Light took up the password, that being his duty, after which I inquired if there was any new business to come before the attention of the lodge.

Which, of course, was the opportunity that Slats had been looking for to shoot off his bazzoo.

"We've got to do something for him," says he, jumping to his feet.

"Who?" says I, wondering if he meant Christopher Columbus or the king of Siam.

"Dynamite," says he. Then he pointed across the room. "Look at him! He's getting weaker every hour."

"*Weaker?*" says Tail Light, holding his nose. "I don't see how you get that idea."

"What makes him smell so strong?" Friday then inquired, sort of worried-like.

"It's the way he was brought up," says Slats. "All goats are that way."

Friday grinned.

"Let's go into the cheese business," says he.

"Meaning which?" says I.

"We can buy ordinary cheese at twenty cents a pound, let him sleep on it, and sell it for Limburger at forty cents a pound."

"Talk sense," says Slats.

"Anyway," Friday continued his grin, "it isn't any crazier than some of your schemes."

"As I was going to say," says Slats, "what Dynamite needs is a few good doses of patent medicine."

Friday threw up his hands.

"Good-by Dynamite!" says he. "I can see his finish, all right, if you start doctoring him."

"We might get Doc Fosse," I suggested, wanting to do the right thing by the goat.

"Yah," says Slats, kind of scornful-like. "*You* ask him to doctor a sick goat and see what he says."

"I've been wondering," says Friday, looking at the patient, "if he's got the pump-handle colic in both lungs or the rubber-bootis in his lower esophagus."

"You can't make me believe," says Slats, "that he actually swallowed your pa's pump handle."

"Just the same," says Friday, "if he dies I'm going to hold a post-office mortar box on him, or whatever you call it."

(He meant a post-mortem.)

"You'd be surprised," says I, "if you found a whole pump inside of him."

"Or a couple of bathtubs," contributed Tail Light, who occasionally shows signs of real intelligence.

"He isn't going to die," says Slats grimly. "We're going to save him."

"With patent medicine?" says Friday.

"Sure thing," says Slats. "Why not?"

"Are you the doctor?"

"You don't have to be a doctor," says Slats, "to give people Peruna."

"Dynamite isn't people," says Friday. "He's a goat."

"What is good for man," quoted Slats, "is good for beast."

"Listen to Longfellow!" yipped Friday. "He's a poet but he don't know it."

"Peruna is wonderful stuff," says Slats.

"Rave on," says Friday. "We're beginning to like it."

"There's my Aunt Gussie," proceeded Slats. "She was sick for years and years—the doctors couldn't help her—nobody could help her. Then she started taking Peruna——"

"And died," Friday put in dismally.

"No," glared Slats, "she didn't die. She got well. And now she has twins."

"Don't make me blush," says Friday. "You must remember that Dynamite isn't that kind of a goat."

"Say, I wish you'd dry up."

"Did I ever tell you about my Uncle Nutmeg?" says Friday. "He was the chief nut of the family—went around half starved for years and years—the doctors couldn't help him

—nobody could help him. Then he started eating horse radish . . . and now he's a little hoarse."

"I'm surprised," says Slats, kind of sarcastic-like, "that he didn't lap up a few cowslips and turn into a cow."

"I've often wondered," grinned Friday, "what would have happened to him if he had specialized in cottage pudding. He might have turned into a combination bungalow and hen house."

Here Dynamite separated himself from a deep groan.

"Look out!" yipped Friday, shielding his head. "He's going to cough up the pump handle."

"You can see for yourself," says Slats, "that he's in bad shape. There's only one thing that will save him."

"Peruna?" says Friday.

"Exactly," nodded Slats. "And the sooner we start giving it to him the better."

Which completes my diary for to-day. Having bought Dynamite a bottle of Peruna (it cost us a whole buck) we can only hope that it saves his life.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SUNKEN TREASURE

August 8—We had quite a time this morning finding out which was the best way of giving Dynamite his medicine. First we tried using a big spoon. But that didn't work at all. For every time we put the spoon in his mouth he tried to bite a hunk out of it, thinking, I guess, that it was some new kind of a silver-plated dessert that we had saved for him. Next we tried pouring the medicine down his throat with a funnel. But that made him sneeze. And, of course, when the sneeze came up the Peruna came up, too. It was necessary to get the medicine down quick. We saw that, all right. So finally we solved the problem by using a squirt-gun for the purpose.

We're pretty sure now that Dynamite is going to pull through. For he seems much livelier to-night. In fact, when we accidentally squirted

the medicine into his ear, instead of his throat, he tried to chase us out of the barn.

A bunch of ladies came to our house this afternoon to play cards. And you should have seen their noses go up when I percolated into the room. They looked at me as though I hadn't had a bath in six months. Later my ma jumped me, telling me that I left such a bad "goat" smell in the parlor that the ladies couldn't eat their refreshments.

August 9—Whoopee! Eggbert came to-day. He's a long-legged kid with red hair and a pug nose. Having told the bus driver to drop him in front of Slats' house, he was mad as hops when the man carried him by.

"The big stiff," says he, as he picked up the leather traveling bag that the angry driver had fired at him before starting off. "He ought to be driving tacks instead of a bus."

"Let's grab a pocketful of rocks," grinned Slats, "and chase him."

"Are you John Beale?" the newcomer then inquired.

"Nobody else but," says Slats, shoving out his mitt. "Let's shake."

"I suppose I shouldn't have called him names," says Eggbert, as the big bus disappeared down the street in a cloud of dust. "But when I get mad I'm mad all over."

"Me, too," says Slats. "So whatever you do when you're around me, don't say pickles."

"Pickles?" repeated the new kid, giving Slats a kind of puzzled look.

"Don't say it again," yelled Slats. "Don't you dare to say it again."

Which, of course, was all a part of our scheme.

"Say," says Eggbert, kind of letting out his neck. "Are you rehearsing?"

"You can say ketchup and chili sauce," says Slats. "But don't say pickles. Mind what I tell you. Unless you want me to fly up and start throwing things, *don't say pickles.*"

Eggbert couldn't resist the temptation to put in a word or two about his own swell temper.

"I throw things, too," he admitted. "In fact, when I get mad my ma can't do a thing with me."

The big boob! He sure needed a dose of "pickles," all right. And did I ever snicker to myself when I thought of the fun that we were going to have with him?

Slats' ma was waiting for us on the front porch.

"And this is little Eggbert!" she kind of cooed, giving the newcomer a juicy kiss. "I'm so-o glad to see you. And how very much you resemble your dear mother."

"Ma's on her way to Boston," says Eggbert, wiping his mouth.

"Yes; I know. Would you like to see your room?"

"Sure thing. Shall I bring my bag?"

"If you will, please."

"Let's go fishing," says Eggbert, when his stuff had been put away in the same dresser where Slats and Tail Light keep their truck, an extra bed having been set up in the big room.

"You can't go fishing in those clothes," says Slats.

"Oh, I've got some old corduroys. Here they are. See?"

Slats and I stuck around while the new kid hung up his good suit and got into his everyday clothes.

"Say," says he, giving Slats a curious look, "what did you mean by telling me that I mustn't——"

"Stop!" says Slats, holding up his hand like a traffic cop.

"What now?"

"If you were a soldier," Slats went on soberly, "would you question the orders of your general?"

"Probably not," the kid grinned. "But you aren't a general."

"What would happen to you," Slats proceeded, "if you *did* question the orders of your general?"

"I'd probably find myself standing in front of a firing squad."

"I never shoot people at sunrise," says Slats gravely. "But, as I told you outside, I throw things. And I usually hit what I aim at, too."

"But you haven't told me yet——"

"Don't say it!" Slats sprang to his feet. "Don't you *dare* to say it. If you do, I'll fire this alarm clock at you."

I went over and whispered in the kid's ear.

"He means pickles," says I mysteriously. "So whatever you do when you're around him, *don't say pickles.*"

Then, to head off further questions, Slats started for the stairs.

"Come on," says he. "Let's go down to the river and try out this fancy fishing tackle of yours."

I wanted to go, too. But my ma stopped me in front of our house, telling me in a I-don't-mean-maybe tone of voice to get busy and manicure the lawn. Which ended the fishing trip for *me*. But I'll be there, all right, when Slats puts on the big act.

To-morrow we're going to write up a testimonial for the Peruna company, like other testimonials that we saw in an almanac of theirs, telling how our poor goat, once at death's door, is now fully recovered. Peruna did it! One of the testimonials reads like this:

> Dear Doctor:
>
> Before I began taking your medicine I was a physical wreck. I drooped; I could neither eat nor sleep; nor could I shave myself, so completely unstrung were my nerves. For the past three weeks I have been taking Peruna as prescribed. And now I am as strong as ever.
>
> (Signed)
>
> A. Post.

August 12—I think I caught some kind of a disease from Dynamite. For I have had a bad fever. I've been in bed for three days. I have a funny itch, too. I wonder if Dynamite has fleas.

August 13—Here's the testimonial that we sent away:

Dear Doctor:

Before I began taking your medicine I was a four-legged wreck. My tail drooped; I could neither eat nor sleep; nor could I comb my own whiskers, so completely unstrung were my nerves. For the past three days I have been taking Peruna with a squirt-gun. And now I smell as strong as ever.

(Signed)
A. Goat.

I bet Dynamite will feel all puffed up when he sees his name in the Peruna almanac. And maybe our testimonial will earn a prize. I hope so. If we get five dollars we'll buy Dynamite a collar. I bet he'll look swell in a collar.

Tail Light came over to-day and played tick-tack-toe with me, the doctor having told me that I could sit up in a chair. Later Mrs. Beale herself dropped in to see me.

"I hear," says my ma, when she and the visitor got through talking about dress patterns and similar truck, "that you have another boy staying at your house."

"Yes, indeed," says Tail Light's ma, refin-

ishing her nose with a shammy. "His name is Eggbert Malcomb. He and John are out treasure hunting this afternoon."

"Then they really believe," says my ma, during the further "treasure-hunting" talk, "that Hiram Potter's iron money chest was dropped into the river near Boney Island?"

"They not only believe the story," laughed Tail Light's ma, "but they've made a list of the things they're going to buy with the recovered money!"

Hiram Potter, so the story goes, was a queer old geezer. Dead now for more than fifty years, he once lived on a farm, where he kept his money in an iron chest, a hole having been provided for the same under the kitchen floor. One night robbers came. Tortured, and thus made to tell where the money was, the old man lost everything. In crossing the river near Boney Island the thieves got into a fight, upsetting the rowboat, the heavy chest, of course, sinking to the bottom. While hunting for the sunken treasure the thieves were picked up by a sheriff. And it was their story that the spot where the chest went down was marked by a queer-shaped sunken log.

Tail Light's ma then told my ma about Eggbert's "ungovernable temper."

"Strangely, though," says she, "he hasn't flared up once to my knowledge."

"You should have seen him yesterday afternoon at the swimming hole," put in Tail Light, who had been running my tin snake back and forth across the bedroom floor. "Boy, was he ever mad! But he kind of backed down when Slats started yelling stuff about pickles. Eggy said he didn't——"

"*Eggy?*" interrupted Mrs. Beale.

"Sure thing," grinned Tail Light. "That's his nickname."

"Good heavens!" says Mrs. Beale. "What a name! I thought Slats and Tail Light were bad enough. But *Eggy!* I give up."

"As I say," Tail Light went on, "Eggy said he didn't say pickles. And Slats said he did. And every time either of them said pickles Slats got madder than ever. He threw rocks, too, and hunks of slimy moss. It was funny."

August 14—This was the regular meeting night of our Comet Coaster club. But as I couldn't be there the fellows decided to postpone Eggy's initiation until next week. Wanting us to think that all city guys are hard-boiled, he told us to-day that he can take any-

thing we've got. He doesn't know, though, that we've got a real goat. Gee! As Slats says, it will help a lot if we sprinkle red pepper on Dynamite's supper the night of the initiation. He'll have more pep then.

August 15—Whoopee! I got a letter to-day from my Uncle Ben. And, can you imagine it, he sent me a contract. A regular author's contract, mind you! I have to sign it. Boy, I guess I'm hot.

Even more thrilling, I got a letter from Mr. Edwards himself, telling me how pleased he was to have the opportunity of collaborating (I had to look up that word in the dictionary) with me.

I'm hoping now that he'll like my second diary as well as my first one. And am I ever eager to see my first book! Oh, baby!

## CHAPTER VI

### DON'T SAY PICKLES!

August 16—At last I'm out of jail, meaning, of course, that I don't have to stay at home any longer and take medicine. I had a touch of summer complaint, Doc Fosse said—if you know what that is. I still itch. I had it on my back yesterday. And now I have it on my legs. My ma tried to make me promise that I'd keep away from Dynamite, telling me that if I didn't I probably would get something worse than the hives, which is the high-toned name that Doc has for the red blotches that have been crawling around on me lately, sampling first one corner and then another. When it came to spreading diseases, my ma said, goats and cats were just alike.

I didn't say anything. For I never talk back to her. But I want to tell you that it didn't fit with me for two cents to have her call our

nice goat an old disease carrier. Goats and cats! Imagine her talking that way! I guess she doesn't know very much about goats, and what swell playmates they are if they don't get peeved, or else she wouldn't liken them to cats. Cats are all right in their place. But goats are a million times classier. Take the way Dynamite put Slats over the alley fence yesterday afternoon. What cat could have done that? Comparing goats with cats to my notion is like mentioning heaven and onion soup in the same breath.

Turned loose this morning with a clean bill of health, as I say, the first thing I did was to beat it over to Slats' house where I found him upstairs picking slivers out of himself.

"What happened to you?" says I. "Did you back up and sit down on a porcupine?"

"Oh," says he, adding another sliver to the collection, "I sort of grazed the top of the fence when Dynamite took after me."

"Peruna," says I, referring to Dynamite's marvelous cure, "sure is wonderful stuff."

"Shucks!" says Slats. "I'm convinced now that Dynamite's only ailment was a slight touch of indigestion."

"I imagine," says I, "that pump handles would be kind of hard on the stomach."

"Ask Tony Crooker about that pump handle," says Slats, sleuthing another sliver.

"Meaning which?" says I.

"He snitched it, later throwing it into Mrs. Diccup's cistern. Dynamite never ate it at all."

"What?" says I. "The cistern?"

"No, you big dumb-bell—the pump handle."

"How about the rubber boots?" I grinned.

"Friday found them under the barn floor where some dog had tried to chaw holes in them."

"By the way," says I, "where's Eggy?"

"Fishing, as usual."

"He likes it, huh?"

"He's crazy over it. . . . Did Friday tell you that we've been doing considerable treasure hunting lately?"

"Haw! haw! haw!" I laughed. "Poor Eggy!"

"To give him his just dues," says Slats, "he's a pretty decent sort of a kid. And when we get him cured of throwing things, I think we're going to like him."

"Instead of humoring him," says I, "his ma

should have warmed up the seat of his pants the way you and I get it sometimes."

"Having no pa, it's her story, as dished out to my ma, that she couldn't bear to lay a finger on him."

"She should have laid a club on him."

"Of course. But some mas are easy."

"Tail Light tells me," I grinned, "that you and Eggy had a big time the other day at the swimming hole."

"Yes," laughed Slats, "whenever he flares up that way I beat him to it. And my pickle talk is so puzzling to him that he forgets to throw things. I'm the one who does the throwing. Boy, I aim right for his head, too."

"Don't wreck him," says I hastily. "For his ma may want to use him when she gets home."

"Oh, he's a good ducker. I'm giving him plenty of practice."

"Honest, Slats," says I, "this pickle junk of yours is too silly for words."

"I know it," says he. "As a matter of fact I picked out something silly on purpose. I figured that's the best way of breaking him. The idea is to make him see what a big silly he really is."

"How long is he going to stay?"

"Another week."

"And do we initiate him next Wednesday night?" I grinned.

"Nothing else but."

Eggy was all excited when he came home at noon.

"I found out something," says he.

"What?" says Slats.

"You know where that log is?"

He meant the "sunken-treasure" log.

"I wish I did," says Slats, giving me a wink.

"Well, you know *about* where it is."

"They say it's east of Boney Island."

"Well, a man was seen there early this morning."

"Who saw him?"

"The kid you call Friday. He told me about it."

(Friday, you see, was mixed up in the scheme, also.)

"What was the man doing?" says Slats. "Fishing?"

"No; he was searching for the treasure with a grabhook."

"*What!*" says Slats, letting on that he was terribly excited.

"Honest," says Eggy. "Friday got up at four-thirty to go fishing. It was just beginning to get daylight, he said. And he saw the man as plain as anything. He had some kind of a powerful flashlight with which he was searching the river bottom. And when Friday followed him around the island he disappeared."

"Crickets!" says Slats, letting out another yard or two of excitement. "I bet it's someone who knows the truth about the chest's location. Probably one of the pirates."

"What pirates?" says Eggy.

"Why, the pirates who stole the money in the first place."

"Were they pirates?"

"Sure thing."

"But I thought you said they died in jail."

"I didn't say they *died* in jail. I said they were sent to jail. And now, having escaped, one of them has come back to lift the treasure. And he's working nights when nobody's around."

Eggy's eyes were as big as teacups.

"What shall we do?" says he. "Tell the police?"

"Don't be silly," says Slats. "We will never get the treasure that way."

"*We?*" says Eggy.

"Sure thing," says Slats. "Do you think I'd pass up a chance like this? There's money in that chest, kid. Oodles of it. And it's going to be ours."

Eggy stirred up his grit.

"But how are we going to get it?" says he, determined to do his part.

"We'll watch the old pirate on the sly. And when he recovers the treasure we'll take it away from him."

"But that will be stealing."

"You say some of the *silliest* things," says Slats. "I suppose you'd refuse to touch Captain Kidd's treasure. It would be *stealing*. Listen! We have as much right to that treasure as the pirate has. And it's going to be ours."

As you probably have figured out, the "pirate" that Friday had seen was none other than old Charley himself. And having tipped off the boatman this afternoon, Slats and I are going to get Eggy out of bed to-morrow morning at four-thirty to witness the treasure's "recovery" by Charley, the pirate.

Gee! I bet we have fun.

Which reminds me that while I was sick in bed I finished the *Talking Frog* book, in which there was a money box a good deal like ours. I never read a funnier or more exciting book. Mr. Edwards sure knows his stuff. It was a lucky day for me, all right, when my Uncle Ben hired him to fix up my diary.

August 17—Well, the long-lost Potter treasure (?????) has finally been lifted from its watery bed! Haw! haw! haw! I'll tell you all about it.

When we got to Boney Island this morning —mind you, we crawled out at four-thirty— there was the mysterious boatman working up and down the east bay with his flashlight. Pretty soon he stopped and lowered a grab-hook into the water. Then we saw him pull up the chest. *Excited?* Say, I thought little Eggy would fall out of the boat.

"He's got it!" says he. "He's got it!"

"Sh-h-h-h!" says Slats. "Don't let him hear you."

"He's heading for the island," says I quickly.

Pretty soon the rowboat disappeared.

" GIT OUT OF HERE, YOU SCURVY, SKULKING VARMITS!"

*Trigger Berg and his 700 Mouse Traps.* *Page* 67

"Where did he go to?" says Eggy excitedly.

"Unless he's a ghost," says Slats, "he's probably following a hidden waterway to the interior of the island."

"I bet that's his hiding place!"

"Sure thing."

"And are you going to capture him?"

"I was just wondering," mused Slats, "if it wouldn't be safer for us to blow the top of his head off."

Eggy almost fainted.

"Oh! . . ." says he. "We mustn't do that."

"Come to think of it," says Slats, "we haven't got a gun. So I guess we'll have to sock him with a club. But I hope the blood doesn't splatter."

"Maybe *he* will have a gun," says Eggy, in good foresight.

"I hope so," says Slats promptly. "For it would be no credit to us to capture an unarmed pirate."

Little Eggy was several seconds swallowing that one.

"You're funny," he finally found his voice.

"There you go!" says Slats, kind of flaring up. "You say I'm funny. And next, I suppose, you'll be saying pickles. But you know

what I told you. You can say ketchup and chili sauce. But unless you want me to start throwing things, *don't say pickles.*"

The party was getting too boisterous to suit Eggy, whose eyes had a kind of worried look.

"Aren't you afraid he'll hear us?" he cautioned.

"*Afraid?*" boomed Slats. "*Me?* Say, kid, don't make me laugh."

"I wish you wouldn't talk so loud," Eggy showed further uneasiness.

"Then quit saying pickles."

"I didn't say——"

"Stop!" thundered Slats. "Don't you dare to say it. *Don't you dare.*"

"You're crazy."

"And now that we thoroughly understand each other," says Slats, "let's proceed with the job of capturing the pirate. Take warning, though: *Don't say pickles!* If you do, everything is lost."

Eggy, of course, figured that he was talking to a lunatic.

"I wish I was home in bed," says he miserably.

Heading for the spot where the pirate had disappeared Eggy learned that the supposed

shore was in reality a shallow waterway cleverly hidden by a dense growth of reeds and tall marsh grass.

"Are you going in?" says he, when Slats parted the reeds and squinted ahead.

"Why don't you ask me if monkeys like fleas?" says Slats, giving the boat a noisy shove with one of the oars.

We were surrounded by bogs, tall reeds and scrubby trees. Some jungle, all right. Then up ahead we caught sight of our old shack, only Eggy, of course, never dreamed that *we* had built it.

"The pirate's hidden lair," says Slats throatily.

"Can you see him?" says Eggy, boring holes into the landscape with his onion-like eyes.

"No," says Slats shortly.

"He's probably asleep," says I.

"I hope so," says Eggy quickly.

Slats stepped ashore.

"You guys wait here," says he, "while I reconnoiter."

"What's that?" says I. "Something good to eat?"

"Don't get funny," says Slats.

"You can't walk there," says Eggy. "It's swampy."

"Watch me," says Slats.

Jumping from bog to bog, he presently came to the silent cabin, which looked kind of spooky-like in the growing daylight. We saw him squint through a tiny window. Then he swaggered back to the boat.

"He's in there, all right. And the money box, too."

Money box! He, of course, meant the old battery box that we had fixed up.

"Asleep?" says I shortly.

"Sure thing. But we can easily wake him up. Come on."

"I don't see the need of waking him up," says Eggy hastily.

"Step carefully," says Slats. "And whatever you do, *don't say pickles.*"

This "pickle" talk was beginning to get on Eggy's nerves. For he realized, of course, that Slats was putting on.

"You and your pickles!" says he. "You give me a pain."

Slats began to dance.

"Didn't I tell you not to say it? Didn't I?"

Eggy squeaked like a pinched mouse as the

rowboat's bailing can whizzed by his head. Then he dodged an oar.

"I can't help it," screeched Slats, heaving the anchor. "It's my temper. I can't control it. See me throw things! Whoopee! I'd throw the old boat itself if it wasn't so blamed heavy."

Here old Charley percolated into sight in the cabin door. And was he ever dolled up for the occasion! Brass rings in his big hairy ears and everything.

"Fifteen men on a dead man's chest," he boomed in perfect pirate style, the quaint little speech, of course, having been carefully rehearsed ahead of time. "Git out of here, you scurvy, skulking, lousy-wigged varmits! Git, now, you cockeyed walruses, or by the bloated ghost of crummy old Davey Jones hisself, blasted gin guzzler that he was, I'll scallop your pimply legs with p'isoned bullets."

This was too much for Eggy. And when Slats and I refused to jump into the rowboat, he skinned out and left us. Boy, did he ever row! We could hear him puffing a mile away.

He says now that he was wise to our scheme all the time. His scare, he says, was all put

on. Fool *him?* A couple of small-town bog jumpers like us? Haw! haw! haw!

Just the same he looked kind of foolish when the "treasure chest" was dumped onto the dock. He showed good stuff, though, in holding his temper, especially when we changed his nickname from Eggy to Pickles.

I've known worse kids. And I kind of have a hunch that his "ungovernable temper" days are over forever. For he knows now how he looks to others when he starts throwing things.

Anyway, what kid with any sense would want to keep up that kind of a racket?

## CHAPTER VII

### OLD BONES

August 18—This was Boy Scout day at our Sunday School. The scouts all wore their uniforms and took up the class collections, after which one of the patrol leaders made a short speech. This, however, was all wasted on the girls in the intermediate class, who were so busy planning an afternoon "treasure hunt" that they never heard a word that was said.

I'll be glad when I'm old enough to join the Boy Scouts. For our church has the swellest patrol in Crocketville. I bet it's hot to be a Boy Scout and wear a uniform. Now when I meet Betty Sharpe in the street she makes faces at me. But if I had a uniform I bet you she'd say "Oh-h-h-h!" sort of admiring-like.

One time when the Boy Scouts from our church were going on an all-night hike Friday kind of stuck himself in. When dusk came they

stopped at an old log house, hemmed in by spooky-looking pine trees. Regular graveyard stuff. Loading up the old fireplace with dry wood, the scouts sat around the jumping flame and shoved ghost stories at each other. Pretty soon they got to talking about the old house itself, sort of speculating on how many people had been murdered there and truck like that. Friday was scared stiff. He couldn't go to sleep. Along about midnight an old white cow poked her head in the door. And the story is still told around town that Friday screeched so loud that he stopped the tug-boat traffic on Lake Michigan, eighty miles away.

It was Slats' suggestion at Sunday School that we all take a walk down the river, which we did, starting out right after dinner. Pretty soon we came within sight of Boney Island, which, of course, started the leader and I to snickering. But Pickles wisely let on that he was deaf. So we dried up. Anyway, now that he's been cured of throwing things there's no sense rubbing it in.

"I dare anyone to swim across," says Slats.

"Tell me first," says Pickles, "how the island got its queer name."

"Years ago," says Slats, "they used to

butcher sick cows there, grinding up the meat for fertilizer, or something. Naturally a lot of bones got scattered around. And so the people began calling it Boney Island."

Friday gave a yip from the water's edge.

"Look!" says he. "It's all hard bottom. I bet we can wade across."

So we skinned out of our clothes, hiding them in the bushes, and with Tail Light bringing up the rear, as usual, we started single file through the water. It was fun. But toward the last we kind of had to drag Tail Light by the neck, for the water got pretty deep.

"I bet a cookie," says Slats, when we finally landed safely on the island, "that we struck the old Indian ford. I've heard my grandpa tell about it."

"Let's mark it," says Friday sensibly.

Nobody lives on the island. So it was perfectly all right for us to scoot around in our birthday suits. And did we ever have fun!

"Phew!" says Pickles. "What's that queer smell?"

"It's the old slaughterhouse," says Slats. "See?" he pointed ahead. "There it is."

"And do they still use it?"

"No. It's been closed for years. But I know how to get in. Come on."

Friday, though, wasn't half as interested in the smelly old building as he was in the whitened bones that surrounded it.

"Look!" he cried. "Here's a leg bone. An old whopper, huh? I bet you it came out of a bull."

"And look at this peachy skull," says Slats, trying to poke his head into the boney hunk.

"It's a shame," says Friday, giving the pile of bones a regretful look, "to let such swell bones as these go to waste."

Wanting Pickles' initiation to be as impressive as possible, we then decided (when he was out of hearing) to pick out the best of the bones as added decorations for our lodge room. We're going to experiment with a couple of skulls, too, to see if we can hollow them out for headpieces. I hope so. Boy, I can imagine how the candidate's knees will wabble when he gets a peek at our reassembled bone yard. A dozen of us "bog jumpers" are no match for him, huh? Well, he'll find out.

As I say, we had overheard some whispered talk among the girls in the intermediate class about a proposed "treasure hunt," never

dreaming, of course, that they'd be dumb enough to pull off the "treasure hunt" on Boney Island. Yet that's exactly what they *did* do. And when we saw them coming (four boat-loads, mind you!) I never was so scared and panicky in all my life.

Nor could we get away. For once they landed on the island they scattered every which way, giggling and cackling like a lot of silly geese. We finally wound up in the old slaughterhouse, where we hid, shivering, in five old tar barrels.

"Boy," says Slats, talking to me through the bunghole of his barrel, "this is awful."

"Keep still," says I, through the bunghole of my own barrel.

"There's a nail in my barrel," Tail Light piped up.

"Only one?" says Friday. "I bet if you'll count again you'll find ten."

"No," says Tail Light. "There's only one."

"I've got ten in my barrel," says Friday.

"Hoop nails?" says Tail Light.

"No; toenails."

"For the love of mud!" says Slats, who, of course, was scared stiff that we'd be overheard. "*Keep still!*"

But Tail Light's brains are all in his feet.

"Ouch!" a gooey squawk percolated through the bunghole of the smaller one's barrel.

"Another hoop nail, I suppose," says Slats furiously.

"No; a sliver."

Friday gagged.

"If this is an old tar barrel," says he, "please deliver me from ever hiding in a sauerkraut barrel."

"The farmer had to mix his swill in something," says Slats.

"What farmer?" says Friday.

"The one who owns this island. He kept pigs here last year."

"Oh, oh!" says Friday. "Buy me a gas mask."

After which Tail Light again uncorked his bazzoo.

"We're just like the forty thieves," says he. "They hid in barrels, too. And a lady poured hot oil on them."

"Iso-vis," says Friday, "or Quaker State?"

Then did Tail Light ever let out a screech!

"A snake!" says he, rocking his barrel. "A snake!"

"Where?" says Friday.

"I'm sitting on it."

"Shake it," says Friday, "and see if it rattles."

"Oh! . . ."

"Another snake?" Friday inquired cheerfully.

"No; it's a toad."

After which the old slaughterhouse with its cobwebby beams and ripe perfumery was filled with deep silence, and nothing else but. For the giggling treasure hunters had appeared outside the door.

"Oh, look!" says the chief giggler. "Here's an old building. Let's explore it."

(! ! ! ! !)

"And see," says another giggler. "There's a row of old barrels. Maybe one of them contains the treasure. Let's look and see."

(! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! !)

"Oh, oh!" the chief giggler started playing a tune with her esophagus.

"What's the matter?" says giggler number two, inquiringly.

"I saw a spider. Let's not go in."

"Who's afraid of spiders," old Busybody planted herself in the front ranks. "Come on, kids."

"Phew!" giggler number two was partially overcome. "What a nasty smell."

"This must be the old slaughterhouse that we heard about."

"Of course."

"Come on, kids," says giggler number one. "Let's go back to the boats."

"One, two, three, four, five," contributed the Walking Arithmetic.

"Five what?" says giggler number one.

"Barrels," says the Walking Arithmetic.

"Probably some nasty old lard barrels," says giggler number one. "Come on, kids; let's beat it."

"I know a game that we can play," says old Busybody.

"Tell us," says gigglers five, six, seven and eight all in one hunk.

"Everybody get a bone," says old Busybody. "That's it. Now, stand here in the doorway and see if you can throw your bone into the first barrel."

(Poor Friday!)

"Oh, goody, goody!" giggler number one's safety valve popped off. "Mine went in."

"And so did mine," says giggler number two, proudly.

"Now," says old Busybody, "get some more bones and see if you can throw them into the second barrel."

(Poor me, this time!)

"What was that?" giggler number one suddenly pricked up her ears. "I thought I heard a groan."

(It was poor Friday in the first barrel!)

"Oh, oh!" squealed giggler number two. "Maybe it's a ghost. Let's run."

(Hip-hip-hurray!)

"As though there's such a thing as a real ghost!" says old Busybody. "Don't be silly. Now, let's see how many of us can hit the target."

(The luck was all theirs!)

"Isn't this fun!" gurgled old Busybody. "I could do it all day."

(Gr-r-r-r!)

"Now," says old Busybody, "let's get some rocks and aim at the third barrel. No; don't pick up those little rocks. Get some nice big ones. Like mine—see? And put them in with a bang."

"Oh, oh!" giggler number one dished out another squeal. "What was that noise? It sounded like a thump."

(It was poor Slats fainting in the third barrel!)

But why go on with it? Enough is to say that they kept us there for more than an hour. And if you could see us to-night you'd think we'd been bombarded with pop bottles. I have bumps all over my bean. And poor Slats almost lost an ear. I never dreamed that girls were such good pitchers. But we're going to get even with them. Gr-r-r-r! And that Betty Sharpe was one of the ringleaders, too.

Legging it for the ford, as soon as the "treasure hunters" had vacated the island, we almost drowned Tail Light in our hurry to reach the main shore. Dressing, we lit out for home.

And now if Pickles goes fishing to-morrow morning, as usual, it's our plan to meet at the ford with our Comet Coasters and start hauling bones.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SNUBBED

August 19—This morning when I was hippety-hopping down the street in front of Betty Sharpe's house I accidentally dropped a nickel through a crack in the wooden sidewalk. And, of course, as soon as she saw me fooling around out there she had to come out to see what was going on. Girls are that way.

"Goodness gracious!" says she, when she got a better look at me. "What happened to the top of your head?"

As though I'd tell *her!*

She had a big wad of chewing gum in her mouth. And thinking that she could make me envious she started stretching it—meaning the gum, of course, and not her mouth.

Which gave me an idea.

"Let me have a hunk of it," says I eagerly.

"A hunk of what?" says she, stretching artistically.

"Your gum," says I.

"Would you chew my gum?" says she, giving me a sort of sick-calf look.

Gosh! She thought that I was in love with her. Just like a girl, wasn't it?

"Of course not," says I quickly. "I just want to put it on the end of a stick."

"What for?" says she curiously.

"I dropped a nickel through a crack in the sidewalk," says I.

Up went her pug nose.

"Go buy your own gum," says she.

I watched her stretch.

"With that number nine mouth of yours," says I, "and those long arms, you sure would make a peachy sword swallower, all right. Why don't you get a job with a circus?"

"I know something," says she.

"So do I," says I, thinking unhappily of the five tar barrels.

"Did you hear about it?" says she quickly.

"I was there when it happened," says I, feeling of my head.

"Silly!" says she. "It hasn't happened yet."

Here, to my good luck, her gum got away from her. And putting a hunk of it on the

end of a stick I soon brought my nickel up through the crack.

"Thanks," says I, offering her the stick.

"And did you really hear about it?" says she, looking at me curiously.

"What?" says I.

"My birthday party," says she.

"Are you going to have a birthday party?" says I eagerly.

"Of course," says she.

"When?" says I.

"Friday night," says she. "And I'm going to have a big birthday cake, too, with candles on it."

"Um-yum," says I, rubbing my stomach.

"If you come over at ten o'clock," says she generously, "you can stand outside the window and watch me eat it."

Which kind of sounded as though *I* was going to be left out!

"Is Slats invited?" says I.

"That little toughy!" says she, again crooking her pug nose. "I should hope not."

"How about Friday?" says I.

"You're three of a kind," says she.

Here Mrs. Sharpe came to the front door.

"Betty dear," she called. "Come and sweep the kitchen floor."

"Haw! haw! haw!" says I. "Another Cinderella."

"You'll think I'm Cinderella," came loftily, "when you see me at the party Friday night. For I'm going to have a new dress and new shoes."

"Be careful," says I, referring to that part of the Cinderella story where the good fairy changed a pumpkin into a coach, "that you and the pumpkin don't get mixed up."

Which made her hot.

"Rowdy!" says she spitefully.

"Anyway," says I, speaking for my chums, "we wouldn't go to your old party if we were invited."

"Bobbie," says she, calling Tail Light by his real name, "is a nice little boy. But the rest of you are bums."

"Are you going to invite *him?*" says I, surprised.

"Of course," says she. "I like him. He's sweet. But I don't like you."

Which kind of shut me up. For, if the truth must be told, Tail Light isn't much. And it made me hot to think that any girl, especially

a smart girl like Betty, would be dumb enough to invite him to a party and leave me out. Calling him "sweet," too! Good grief! It would serve him right, I gritted my teeth, if I caught him on the way to the party and turned his pants inside out.

But I soon forgot about the coming birthday party when Slats and Tail Light meandered into sight with their Comet Coasters, to which sideboards had been bolted. Heading for the old Indian ford, where Friday was waiting for us with a rented boat, we later rowed to the island and loaded our boat with old bones.

"How many skulls are you going to take?" says Friday, when we were messing the junk around.

"Oh, about twenty," says Slats, picking out the best ones.

Dumping our first load of bones on the mainland we loaded up our coasters, Friday in the meantime having returned to the island for a supply of big leg bones. These would look swell, we figured, when fixed up kind of criss-cross under the skulls. Like the poison sign on carbolic-acid bottles. Later we hauled home a lot of cow teeth. By covering our truck with weeds nobody along the road got wise to the

fact that we were hauling old bones. And now, having made at least twenty trips to the island, we have the finest collection of bones that you ever set eyes on.

I never worked so hard in all my life. And if I don't have the leg ache before morning I miss my guess. As for Tail Light, he petered out shortly after two o'clock and we had to make a bed for him in the weeds, later hauling him home on top of a load of hoofs.

And to think that Betty Sharpe would pick out a worthless little squirt like him in preference to me! Gr-r-r-r! Instead of hauling him home—the dear little sweetie!—we should have dumped him in the river.

Pickles caught eleven crappies to-day. And having found out where they are keeping themselves he's going back to-morrow for more. Which is perfectly lovely so far as our plans are concerned. For now we can put in the whole day arranging our bones and fixing up our headpieces.

August 20—Oh, baby! We're all set for the initiation. And does our lodge room ever look peachy! Bones to the right of us, as Tennyson

says in poetry, and bones to the left of us. Having locked ourselves in the barn, the better for secrecy, we dropped our work when Mr. Fish hammered on the door, asking us what we were doing in there. We were fixing up our lodge room, we told him, for an important initiation. I think he wanted to come in and see for himself what we were doing. But when we told him that our work was kind of secret-like he went away and left us.

To make Pickles' initiation all the more impressive we have curtained off one corner of the lodge room, calling it the Grotto of Blood. Here we have a special assortment of old bones daubed up beautifully with red paint. Pickles will shiver, all right, when we tell him to go in there and sit down. Then, when he does sit down, he'll get a rat-a-tat-tat on the top of his bean that he won't soon forget. For we have fixed up a trick seat. A shower of teeth! That's what it is, all right. For when the seat tips back the teeth come tumbling down in a mess. Pickles will think that the roof of the barn is caving in on him.

Oh, yes, I met Betty Sharpe to-day in front of the post office. But I didn't speak to her. When she turned up her nose at me I did the

same. I suppose she's busy getting ready for her party. As though *I* cared! Huh! I bet her birthday cake won't be fit to eat. Anyway, Pickles' initiation is going to be a whole lot more exciting than her old party.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE INITIATION

August 21—I have a lot of stuff to write down to-night. But whether or not I can write it all down in one big gob is another question. For if you must know the truth I've laughed till I'm weak. Don't imagine, either, that the laugh is on Pickles. I guess not! Friday's pa has a black eye and a sprained wrist. My pa has a cracked rib. And Slats' pa has a plaster cast on his nose. Nor could they say a single sharp word to us about their combined misfortunes. For they had no business hiding behind our Grotto of Blood curtain. They got just what they deserved, only, of course, I'm sorry about my pa's cracked rib.

He gave me a dollar not to tell my ma how the accident happened, kind of making out to her, sheepish-like, that he had been dragged around by a Ford. But little Tail Light let the

cat out of the bag, as usual. And then did my ma ever laugh when she got the truth of the matter over the telephone! Still, like me, she felt kind of sorry for my poor pa and did the best she could to fix him up. I heard them talking after they went to bed. I heard my pa groaning, too. And every time he groaned my ma kind of snickered, thinking, I guess, as a picture of the initiation ran through her head, that his agony was largely put on. For everybody knows that a cracked rib isn't much.

Putting a quick finish on my breakfast this morning I hurried down the street to Slats' house where I found Pickles exercising the family lawn mower.

"You better save your strength," says I.

"Meaning which?" says he, draping himself against a tree.

"You'll need it," says I, "before bedtime."

Told then that this was the day of his initiation he let on that he was surprised.

"I had forgotten all about it," says he, kind of unconcerned-like.

"We haven't," says Slats quickly.

"I suppose you've got everything all fixed up, huh?" says Pickles, still convinced, of course, that two small-town bog jumpers like

us were no match for a smart city geezer like he claimed to be.

"Practically everything," says Slats. "Of course," he added, "we have a few little details to attend to, such as sharpening the butcher knives and enlarging the blood bucket."

"*Butcher knives!*" says Pickles. "Haw! haw! haw! You make me laugh."

"Do the city boys ever have initiations?" says Slats.

"Sure thing," says Pickles importantly. "In fact, that's where the idea originated. So don't kid yourself into thinking," he added, patting himself on the chest, "that you guys can put over anything new on this bird."

Later we put the finishing touches on our bony headpieces, which look swell, but, bu-lieve me, they're blamed hard on the neck. For they weigh about twenty pounds apiece. In fooling around with his, to see if it would go on backwards as well as frontwards, Tail Light got his head stuck in it. And did he ever squawk when we sort of extracted him. But we're used to his squawks. And what if he did lose a little hair? Shucks! He's lucky that he didn't lose his whole scalp.

This afternoon I heard him coaxing his ma

to buy him a new pair of long pants. I know, all right, what he's got on his mind. It's that blamed birthday party of Betty Sharpe's. Gr-r-r-r! The more I think of her favoring him the madder I get. And if I could fix that cow's skull on him the night of the party, so that he couldn't possibly get out of it, you can bet your boots I'd do it. I guess he'd look sweet, huh, going to the party with a cow's skull on his head.

Well, when night came we opened our lodge, having earlier fed Dynamite gumdrops flavored with Cayenne pepper. We sprinkled pepper on his supper, too. And when he began to froth at the mouth, and roll his eyes, we knew, all right, that he was in perfect trim for the initiation.

We usually keep him in a stall in the back part of the barn. But when he started chewing the nails out of the wood, so eager was he to do his part in the coming initiation, we took him outside and chained him in the alley, having first made sure that the Crooker gang was nowhere in sight. Had we looked behind the Grotto of Blood curtain we would have found three men, gotten together by Friday's pa, who figured, I guess, after secret inspection of our

lodge room, that the initiation was going to be something unusual. But we never dreamed that our pas would pull a snoopy trick like that on us.

Well, we got into our headpieces, having enlarged the opening of Tail Light's to save the rest of his scalp, and I rapped for order.

"Chief of the Dungeon Guards," says I, addressing Friday, who had been given this special office.

"Yes, Most High and Noble Assassin," says Friday, getting to his feet and saluting.

"Is there blood on the threshold of our castle?" says I.

Friday looked down at a gob of red paint.

"There is, Most High and Noble Assassin," says he.

"Whose blood is it?" says I.

"The life blood of our last victim," says Friday.

"Victim?" says I.

"I mean candidate," Friday corrected himself.

Pickles was parked in one corner of the room awaiting his part in the ceremony.

"Haw! haw! haw!" says he fearlessly. "This is going to be a scream."

"What was that?" says I, sort of pricking up my ears.

"It was the candidate, Most High and Noble Assassin," says Friday. "He was praying for his life."

"*Praying!*" says Pickles. "Haw! haw! haw! haw!"

"Then we have a candidate for initiation?" says I.

"Yes, Most High and Noble Assassin," says Friday.

"Who is he?" says I.

"A young smart aleck from Milwaukee," says Friday.

"What's his name?" says I.

"Pickles," says Friday.

"Does he throw things?" says I.

"He used to," says Friday. "But I understand that he's completely cured."

"Aw! . . ." says Pickles. "Lay off that stuff."

I then called on the Chief Butcher.

"Has the candidate been prepared for initiation?" says I.

"Yes, Most High and Noble Assassin," says Slats, saluting.

"Is he blindfolded?" says I.

"Yes, Most High and Noble Assassin," says Slats again.

"Has he a board in the seat of his pants?" says I.

"Yes, Most High and Noble Assassin."

"Then lead him to the altar in the center of the room," says I, "make him bend over with the seat of his pants facing the east and unchain the goat."

Pickles pricked up his ears.

"What's that?" says he. "You guys haven't got a real goat, have you?"

"Bring it in," says I, "and let the candidate smell it."

"This isn't fair," says Pickles, when Dynamite let out an eager blat.

"What isn't fair?" says I.

"To make me bend over," says Pickles, "and let the goat upset me."

"Don't kid yourself," says I. "This goat is no upsetter; he's a putter."

"Meaning which?" says Pickles.

"Well," says I, "when he hits 'em square he usually puts 'em through the side of the barn."

"Aw! . . ." says Pickles. "Have a heart."

Of course, we never intended to let Dynamite

bunt him through the side of the barn. For that wouldn't be fair, with him blindfolded and everything. We just talked that way to scare him. We did intend, though, to make him straddle the goat and circle the lodge room.

And now let me tell you how smart Dynamite is. From the instant he was brought into the lodge room he knew that there were eavesdroppers, or whatever you call it, behind the Grotto of Blood curtain. *Bing!* Tearing loose he gave one bound across the room. We saw him go through the curtain as though it was made of tissue paper. There was an awful racket behind the curtain. And when Friday's pa tumbled into sight, holding the seat of his pants, with a hunted look in his eyes and the goat tearing after him, I guess you can imagine how surprised we were. Gosh! Our eyes stuck out like peeled onions.

Having bunted Friday's pa out of the barn and halfway across the garden, Dynamite went back after my pa, who tumbled out of the Grotto of Blood screeching bloody murder. Then there was a fearful yell from behind the curtain as the decorations, teeth and all, came tumbling down on top of Slats' pa. Talk about *excitement!* Everybody got in everybody

else's way. Our doctor book was tramped on in the fracas. Then over went the altar. And every time Dynamite missed the target (which wasn't often!) and struck the barn wall, down came a shower of bones. But finally my pa and Slats' pa made their escape, after which Dynamite staggered into a corner and coughed up three pants buttons and a suspender buckle. He was all tuckered out. So we couldn't have continued the initiation if we had wanted to.

The men dragged themselves into Friday's kitchen for repairs. And when we peeked through the window they pulled down the curtain. But we could hear them talking.

"Good grief!" says my pa. "We'll be the laughingstock of the town."

"And what will our wives say?" says Slats' pa, mournfully.

"Mine will never hear about it," says my pa, "if I can prevent it."

But she did, as I have written down. So my pa might just as well have saved his dollar for all the good it did him to bribe me to keep quiet.

Usually when a mix-up like this occurs our pas scold us. But this is one time when the fault is theirs. Gee! Did my pa ever look

funny when Dynamite bunted him over the altar! I'll never forget it as long as I live.

(Later.) Slats just called up to tell me that the doctors are hopeful that in time his pa's nose will grow back in place. I didn't particularly notice Mr. Beale's nose before the doctors put it in a cast. But Slats says it was turned completely upside down. Which reminds me of a poem that I read the other day about a man who had his nose cut off. He was a snuff hound. And to his great joy the doctors sewed the nose on upside down, which made it easy for him to pack his nostrils full of snuff. The only drawback was that he had to stand on his head to sneeze.

## CHAPTER X

### A STORY OF THE NORTH WOODS

August 22—Usually when breakfast is ready my ma yells at me from the foot of the stairs, telling me to hurry up and pile out. But this morning she came all the way up the stairs and awoke me kind of quiet-like.

"Sh-h-h-h!" says she, when I opened my eyes.

"What's the matter?" says I, too sleepy at first to remember what had happened.

"Your pa's asleep," says she.

Everything came back to me then.

"How is he?" says I, kind of anxious-like.

"Cranky," says she shortly.

"It isn't my fault that he got banged up," says I, when she advised me to tiptoe down the stairs.

"Probably not," says she. "But it will be to your interests, I think, to keep out of his sight as much as possible."

So I spent the day at old Charley's house down by the river. Friday was there, too, and so was Slats. As for Pickles, he left early this morning for Milwaukee, his ma having sent for him.

"When are you coming to the city to visit me?" says he to Slats, while we were waiting for the bus.

Slats laughed.

"I don't know as I'd dare to," says he.

"Why not?" says Pickles.

"Well," says Slats slowly, "after all the rough stuff that we've dished out to you since you've been here I wouldn't blame you if you tried hard to get even."

"Shucks!" says Pickles. "I've had the time of my life. Besides," he sobered, "I guess I was kind of smart when I first landed here. I probably got no more than what I deserved."

Slats looked at him sort of warm-like.

"Do you know what I think of you now?" says he.

"What?" says Pickles curiously.

"I think you're a blamed swell kid," says Slats, shoving out his mitt.

"And me, too," says I quickly.

"There's a lot of difference between the city

and the country," says Pickles. "But don't get the idea, just because you live in a small town, that you have all the fun. The city boys have fun, too, as I'll prove to you if you'll pay me a visit."

"I'm coming," says Slats earnestly.

"And me, too," says I, "if you'll let me."

"The more the merrier," says Pickles.

"And how about next summer?" says Slats eagerly. "Are you coming back for more adventures?"

"Sweet essence of sauerkraut!" says Pickles. "You're blamed tootin' I'm coming back. And who knows," he wound up, with sparkling eyes, "but what next year we'll find the *real* Potter treasure."

It was lonesome after he left. And somehow we didn't have a bit of fun at old Charley's house, though usually we like to go there. Borrowing some cane poles we tried fishing from the dock. But all we caught was a three-legged mud turtle.

Thursday is always boiled-ham-and-cabbage day at old Charley's house. And having been invited to stay to dinner (Slats did the hinting), what do you know if the four of us didn't sit around the table and eat out of the kettle!

Not that Slats and I and Friday hadn't better manners. But that was old Charley's regular way of eating, so, of course, being company, we had to do the same.

"I don't s'pose that you boys ever heerd," says he, when we were loafing on the grass in front of his cabin, "that I used to be a lumberjack in my younger days."

"Tell us about it," says Friday eagerly.

## THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

*As told to us by old Charley Robin*

I was workin' for Ike Harkness that season, in the upper part of Michigan. We had started in early in the fall, Ike havin' contracted to deliver somethin' like fifty thousand logs down the river the following spring. So, as you kin see, there was a heap of work ahead of us.

Ike wasn't what you'd call an easy man to work for. I guess not! He wanted things to come his way. And any time they didn't come his way he'd fly off the handle and raise cain with his men. If he hadn't bin so all-fired big and husky we could have talked back to him. But a feller was greener than grass to try that on Ike, which isn't sayin', though, that

it never was tried. We were a whole hour bringin' one feller to his senses. When he finally sat up and looked around he thought he had been kicked by a mule. Ike sure could handle his mitts. And he had the weight back of them. Not fat, mind you, but muscle—pure muscle.

Taken right straight through, the camp was a pretty tough outfit. I was some rough and ready in those days myself. But there were men in the gang who for pure devilishness could make me look like a near neighbor to old St. Peter hisself. Ike's reputation as a boss was none too good. Hirin' help with him was more a matter of takin' what he could git. Which accounts for the kind of help he had.

One of the crew was a feller named Simonsen, a man who was so much decenter than the rest of us, takin' us as a whole, that I often wondered how the company had succeeded in signin' him up. He was pretty much of a quiet cuss and didn't have a lot to say about hisself. But we found out that he was married, though somethin' had happened to start his wife off in one direction and him in another. What the trouble was I never heerd. For, as I say, the

thing he did very little of was to talk about hisself.

Shortly after Thanksgivin' Ike sent Lem Spencer, one of the teamsters, to town for a load of provisions. And when Lem came back he brought a bunch of letters, one of which he handed to Simonsen who turned white when he read it. Later I heerd him tell Ike that the letter contained news of his wife's death; and he asked to git off for a spell, Ike givin' grudged consent.

Simonsen was gone for more than two weeks. Then one night just as we were stickin' our feet under the grub bench in he walks, and I'll be blest if he didn't have a kid with him—a little shaver not more than six years old.

Simonsen told Ike that he had tried to find a home for the boy, but failed. And was Ike ever sore! Wough!

"This hain't no orphans' home," he blurted out in his rough way.

"Have a heart," says Simonsen, lookin' kind of haggard-like. "I told you that I'm up against it."

"Well," consented Ike, "now that you've got the kid here you can keep him for the present. But see that you make other arrangements

as soon as possible. For he can't stay around here for good. And that's final."

Some of the listeners felt pretty sore at Ike for blurtin' out that way in front of the kid. For no matter how rough men git there's somethin' about an innocent-actin' little boy that cuts deep into their hearts, bringin' up mind pictures of their own childhood, and things like that. As for this little feller in partic'lar he shore was the brightest-eyed and manliest-appearin' little rascal that *I* ever set eyes on. And after one good look at him I had the feelin' that I wanted to bounce him up and down on my knee and sort of roll him around, puppy-fashion, on the floor.

But though we didn't like it the way Ike spoke up, nothin' was said. For we knew Ike! Nothin' makes for organization more thoroughly than knowin' who's boss. Which was our case exactly. Ike maintained organization in his camp by makin' every mother's son of us feel at all times that he was boss. And he was. Nor was his authority seldom questioned. For, as I say, he was mighty handy with his mitts, and ready to back up his side of the argument with physical persuasion any time of the day.

Well, all this time little Jimmy—which was

the kid's name—was standin' just inside the grub-house door where Simonsen had left him. I guess he didn't quite catch the drift of matters, bein' so small. Then, too, he must have bin hungry, for he kept sizin' us up as we sat at the long table. Finally he turned to his pa.

"Aren't the men going to ask little Jimmy to eat?" he inquired.

Say, the way we shook that kid out of his coat and into a seat at the table was a caution. Then did we ever stuff him! Simonsen, knowing better, should have stopped us. But he didn't say anything. I guess he was glad that we had taken a likin' to the boy. Anyway, we gave the little shaver a whole lot more than his capacity justified, never sensin' that we were puttin' him in the way of a whole lot of misery until he woke us up at midnight with the stomach ache. I remembered then what I used to git for the stomach ache when I was young. But when we looked through the medicine chest for a bottle labeled "peppermint" there was none to be had. So all we could do was to kick ourselves for bein' such fools as to overstuff the kid and warm plates which, with a towel wrapped around them, were applied where they would do the most good.

The next mornin', though, the kid was as bright and chipper as ever, havin' got up with the rest of us. I heard Simonsen tellin' him to stick close to the camp and not git lost or mixed up in any mischief. The cook told the father that he would kind of look out for the boy durin' the day.

As I say, little Jimmy had made a lot of friends among the men. Always when we started out in the mornin' he was there to wave good-by to us. And his bright little face was the most welcome thing that we saw when we came in at night. At the end of the second day he was callin' all of us by our first names, only he later hitched an "uncle" to Ike's name.

I could see, though, that we were pretty much of a puzzle to him. And I sensed that he hadn't been used to havin' a bunch of roughnecks like us around him. I guess his ma had been a gentle, sensible little woman and had spent a lot of time trainin' him. He certainly showed the marks of good bringin' up. In fact he was the best little lad I ever set eyes on. Not one of the goody-goody kind. But a straight out-and-out little man all the way through.

Yes, we fell hard for that kid. And if he hadn't been such a sensible little feller I dare

say he would have been pretty badly sp'iled. For he certainly got a lot of attention, with the camp's best whittlers turnin' out blocks for him and animals and all kinds of truck. But you couldn't sp'ile that boy. No, sir-ee. He never tried to git fresh. Nor did he think it was fun to play mean tricks on us. Yet he was as full of life as a cricket and as bright as a new silver dollar. Bein' the oldest of seven boys I've seed the time when my own pa had to drive us to make us work. Little Jimmy, though, loved to fetch and carry for us, even actin' tickled when we called on him to help us.

Ike made up his mind right off the bat that he was goin' to dislike the kid. I guess, though, he wasn't very long findin' out that he had an awful uphill job on his hands. He tried to be gruff and cross. But that didn't faze Jimmy at all. Somehow the little rascal took it for granted that everybody should like him. Of course, he realized that Ike was sharp with him. But it never occurred to him that he wasn't in favor. In his baby way he reasoned it out that if he was good to Ike, the latter in return, would be good to him. Ike held out for a week. But when little Jimmy began the "uncle" stuff, that was the finish.

Somehow we had a world of respect for the little lad. We had been knockin' around with rowdies for so long that we kind of overlooked the fact that the world contained a lot of decent people. But when we found out that little Jimmy had been taught that the truth was somethin' to be respected under all circumstances, and that swearin' wasn't manly as well as bein' wrong generally, we kind of got the habit of puttin' the soft pedal on our gab when the kid was around.

Every night before he got into his bunk he'd say his little prayer. And, bu-lieve me, when he dished out the "Now-I-lay-me-down-to-sleep" stuff, always askin' God in the end to bless each and every one of us, there was quietness in that old bunk house, and nothin' else but, though, if I must admit it, the kid's first prayer came to us as somethin' of a shock.

I don't know whether Simonsen ever said anything to Ike about lettin' the kid stay with us or not. But after a week or two, as Ike's attitude changed, I saw that the boy's chances of stayin' were pretty fat. And havin' finally given up his sharp attitude toward the kid, there wasn't one of us who did more for the little feller than old Ike hisself.

Then was it ever a happy day for Jimmy when Ike went to town and bought the youngster a couple of storybooks. One was about a feller named Jack who killed off a flock of giants. After that Ike or Simonsen had to read to the kid every night. And more than once the little shaver had us all lined up in an excitin' evenin' game of "Button, button—who's got the button."

TWO DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS HE HUNG UP HIS STOCKINGS.
*Trigger Berg and his 700 Mouse Traps.* *Page* 110

## CHAPTER XI

### THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

August 22—(Continued)—With Christmas comin' on, the men began to wonder if Ike would blow hisself for a couple of gobblers. And one night Lem Spencer spoke up about it, intendin' the remark, of course, for Ike's ears.

Little Jimmy was sittin' just across the table playin' with some wooden soldiers that had been whittled out for him. And when he heard the word "Christmas" he jumped to his feet and began dancin' around the room like he was crazy.

"Christmas! Christmas!" he shouted, clappin' his hands. "Goody! Goody! That's the time old Santy Claus comes." And then he began talkin' about his stockings, tellin' us how he was goin' to hang them up and what he wanted old Santy to bring him.

He was full of Santy Claus stuff after that.

And, of course, whenever he talked about it to us we lied like pirates, tellin' him sure thing—old Santy had reindeers and a sleigh and everything else.

Then two days before Christmas he got out his stockings, wantin' to be sure there were no holes in them, sort of takin' it for granted that "Uncle Ike" would hang up his, too.

And I wish you could have seen Ike's face when we started joshin' him about it. Finally he got sore, tellin' us to dry up or instead of a merry Christmas we'd be participatin' in a wake.

On Christmas Eve we were all on hand to see the fun, Jimmy, of course, the most excited of all. And the questions he asked us! Were we sure that Santy would come? Would he bring Jimmy a lot of candy and some more books? And would it be all right if he asked old Santy for a sled, too?

We hung around to see what Ike would do. For we knew that he was all wrapped up in the kid. And we felt pretty sure that he wouldn't do anything to spoil the little feller's pleasure. Yet we could hardly picture a man of his stamp hangin' up his stockings!

Jimmy got ready for bed earlier than usual,

so eager was he to receive his gifts. First he pinned his stockings together, the whole outfit of us standin' around in a circle and watchin' him—glad to a man that Lem had earlier made a special trip to the nearest toy shop. Then, the stockings havin' been properly fastened together, their young owner hung them on a nail near the foot of his bunk, tellin' us for the hundredth time to be sure and leave the door unlocked.

"I s'pose," says he, "that in most houses Santy Claus comes down the chimney. But I don't see how he could *ever* bring a sled down our chimney."

We thought for a moment or two that he was goin' to forgit about Ike. Then, havin' crawled into his bunk, he backed out again.

"Aren't you going to hang up your stockings, Uncle Ike?" he inquired.

Someone snickered.

"Shore thing, Ike," drawled Lem. "Be a sport and hang 'em up. For who knows but what old Santy will leave you a powder puff."

Ike's face was as red as a beet. And watching, Jimmy was plainly puzzled. He stood there for several seconds. But as Ike made no move to comply, the little feller slowly took

down his own stockings. His lips quivered. But he said nary a word as he crawled back into his bunk.

Which, I want to tell you, put a quick finish on the snickerin' business.

Lem was the first one to recover his voice.

"What's the matter, Jimmy?" says he. "Why did you take your stockings down?"

But there was no answer. And then, with his face buried in the pillow, the little feller started sobbin' as though his heart would break.

Lem reached into the bunk.

"Come, come," says he, pullin' the boy into sight. "This'll never do. Git them stockings back on that nail. Or the first thing you know old Santy will pass you up."

"I—I don't want to hang them up," sobbed Jimmy.

"Why not?" says Lem, puzzled.

"Uncle Ike don't want me to."

"Pshaw! Of course he wants you to. Whatever put that idear in your head?"

"But why doesn't he hang up his own?"

"That's it exactly," says Lem soberly. "Why don't you, Ike? Tell him."

"Don't you want to hang up your stockings

with mine, Uncle Ike?" the little feller then inquired, lookin' across the room with damp eyes.

We all turned to see what Ike would do. But if we had expected to see him act confused we were disappointed.

Stridin' across the room he sat down on the kid's bunk and started unlacin' his heavy leather boots.

"Shore thing I want to hang up my stockings with you," says he. "So git yours back on that nail and I'll hang mine underneath."

Which he did, returnin' the boots to his naked feet. After which he turned to us with a look in his narrowed eyes I can't describe.

"You fellers figured as how you were goin' to have a lot of sport here to-night, huh? Thought just because you were lookin' on that I'd disappoint the kid, huh? Well, I hain't, have I? Got my socks hung up, hain't I? Ain't it turnin' out to be as funny as you thought? No? Well, then," he wound up grimly, "I'll make it funny enough."

He turned to the kid.

"Jimmy," says he in a sort of purrin' voice, "the rest of the boys are jest dyin' to git in on this. They want to hang up their stockings the worst way. Bless their dear little hearts

they've bin chitterin' about it for weeks. Shore thing. So what shall we do, Jimmy? Shall we let them hang up their stockings, too?"

"Oh, goody, goody!" cried Jimmy, jumpin' up and down. "Won't that be fun! Sure thing, Uncle Ike, Jimmy wants *everybody* to hang up his stockings."

Ike turned to us.

"You heerd what the kid said," he purred. "So git your boots off, you big jackasses, and skin out of your socks. Come, now! You know me, men. That's it, Lem. I'm glad you realize that I'm talkin' business."

He looked at his watch.

"Jimmy's a little lad," he added. "And it's high time he was in bed. So don't keep him waitin'. You've got jest five minutes to git your stuff ready for old Santy Claus, who's liable to burst in on us any minute."

"And what'll happen," one man held off, "if we refuse?"

"Wa-al," drawled Ike. "You know me."

Yes, we knew *him,* all right! So we did the safe and sensible thing: We got out of our boots and skinned off our socks and hung them up jest as he ordered, pretendin' that we liked it, too.

And what do you know if he didn't crawl out of bed that night while we were asleep and stuff a five-dollar bill in each pair of socks!

So Jimmy, you see, wasn't the only one who had somethin' to show the followin' mornin'.

Here old Charley bustled to his feet to wait on a fish customer.

"Later," says he, when the customer had been taken care of, "Jimmy was sent to a private school in the southern part of the state. And did I ever laugh the time Ike and I went there in the dead of winter to see how the kid was gittin' along. For the schoolmarm coaxed Ike—hard-b'iled driver that he was—to dress up like Santy Claus. *Him,* mind you! It shore was funny."

"Tell us about it," says Friday eagerly.

But the old man slowly shook his head.

"No," says he. "I've got to go fishin' now. But if you'll come around some rainy day, or when I'm loafin', I'll tell you the rest of the story."

Oh, yes, Tail Light came over to my house this evening to show me his new long pants. He has a pair of red suspenders, too. Boy, they're loud enough to flag a train! He can

hardly wait, he says, till to-morrow night.

I heard other kids talking about the party, too. I can see that it's going to be a swell party, all right. And because he's the only one in our gang to get an invitation Tail Light thinks he's smart. The little brat!

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BIRTHDAY CAKE

August 23—I guess that Tail Light won't have so much to say now about being Betty Sharpe's pet. For did he ever disgrace himself to-night at the party! Oh, baby! *Laugh?* Say, I thought I'd split my sides. As for the birthday cake—um-yum-yum! Slats and I and Friday got it all!

This morning Mrs. Sharpe came over to our house to telephone.

"I suppose you know," says she to my ma, when she got through ordering ice cream and dill pickles, "that to-day is Betty's birthday."

"Yes," says my ma, looking at me out of the corner of her eye, "I heard something about a very select birthday party."

Mrs. Sharpe screwed her face up sort of concerned-like.

"I'm *so* sorry," says she, "that Betty didn't

invite your boy. But she says he makes faces at her. And she can't bear the sight of that Ronald Fish and the oldest Beale boy. . . . Would it inconvenience you, Mrs. Berg, if I borrowed your dining room chairs?"

"Not at all," says my ma generously.

"And I'd like to get your folding table, too, if you don't mind, and a dozen spoons—some of your best ones."

"I suppose," says my ma politely, as she got out the spoons and other truck, "that Betty is all excited over the coming party."

"Yes, indeed," says Mrs. Sharpe. "And you should see the *wonderful* birthday cake that Mrs. Camel is frosting for her. It stands this high," the speaker measured.

"I've heard," says my ma, "that Mrs. Camel is the best cake baker in the county."

"I always have her bake my party cakes," says Mrs. Sharpe. "And she does it so cheaply, too. But lately I've had to watch her. For she's getting old. And salt, you know, looks just the same as sugar to some near-sighted people."

Then, can you imagine it, the gabby old thing had the nerve to ask me to lug the borrowed chairs over to her house!

"I'm glad," says I, "that you've got a piano of your own."

"Which reminds me," says she promptly, turning to my ma, "that I *would* like to borrow your piano bench if it won't inconvenience you. For ours is a wreck."

My ma hid a smile.

"Trigger will be very glad," says she, "to haul it over to your house on his coaster wagon."

Which I did. But, bu-lieve me, I didn't *want* to do it.

"Oh! . . ." says Betty, in that superior way of hers, when I dropped the junk on her front porch, which was all trimmed up with colored tissue paper. "Look who's here! He found out that I'm giving a party and he's hanging around."

"I wish you were a boy," says I hotly.

"Why?" says she.

"I'd like to sock you," says I.

Which brought a flash to her eyes.

"Rowdy!" says she spitefully.

"Are your guests going to stay all night?" says I.

"It's none of your business," says she, "if they do."

"I was just wondering," says I, "if your ma was liable to need a couple of beds."

Then who should percolate into sight but young Lochinvar himself.

"I was just thinking about you," says Betty sweetly.

"*Me?*" Tail Light spoke with great intelligence, shifting an all-day sucker from one side of his sticky mug to the other.

"Sure thing," says Betty, looking at him coyly.

"You certainly weren't overworking your brain," I told her, "if you were thinking about *that* piece of cheese."

She gave me a look that was intended to chill my backbone.

"If you're through carrying furniture," says she loftily, "we'll excuse you."

I went home as mad as a pinched bumblebee.

"You sure were smart," I told my ma, "to make me lug that junk over there."

"By doing it," says she quietly, "you proved that you are a little gentleman. And I want you to know that I'm very proud of you."

Which made me feel better.

"Where's my pa?" I then inquired.

"The doctors are taking an X-ray of his cracked rib."

"Is he getting worse?" says I anxiously.

"No," my ma shook her head. "But he wants to find out just how serious his injury really is."

"Let's hope," says I, "that it isn't as bad as he thinks."

"How is Mr. Beale?" my ma then inquired.

"He's still blowing his nose through a hunk of plaster," says I.

"And is Mr. Fish back in his office?" was my ma's further inquiry.

"I think so," says I.

Later Slats and I crawled into the gooseberry bushes in his back yard for a quiet talk.

"We've got to fix that kid," says he grimly.

"What kid?" says I.

"Tail Light," says he.

Boy! He was talking real stuff now.

"What shall we do to him?" says I eagerly. "Drag him into an alley, when he starts for the party, and flavor him with Limburger cheese?"

"Shucks!" says Slats. "He'd never go to the party if we did that to him."

"I'd like to knock his block off," says I.

"He needs it," says Slats. "But, of course, a fellow your size can't pick on a little kid."

"I'm glad God wished him onto you," says I, sort of fervent-like, "instead of me."

"What do you suppose he told my ma this morning," says Slats.

"What?" says I.

"She asked him why I wasn't invited to the party, too. And he told her that Betty said I was a bum."

"It's too bad," says I, "that a fellow can't use tar and feathers in a case like this."

But, bu-lieve me, we fixed that little squirt. And did I ever snicker up my sleeve to-night when he sashayed past our house on his way to the party, as proud as a peacock in his new pants and red suspenders, never suspecting, of course, that we had secretly cut the main threads of his suspender buttons.

Later, when it got dark, Slats and I and Friday stood outside Betty's big bay window, through which we could see the select group playing "Winkem" and other silly games. The most conspicuous one in the room with his white shirt and blood-red suspenders, Tail Light was having the time of his life. Then, to our good fortune, someone suggested playing "Spin the platter."

While the others were getting the chairs arranged in a circle young Lochinvar and his sweetie sauntered over to the bay window.

"Are you having a good time?" says Betty, tickling the leaves of her ma's potted rubber plant with her delicate white hands.

"Swell," says Tail Light, manfully stretching his red suspenders.

Betty's eyes filled with admiration.

"Are they new?" she inquired, touching them gently.

"Sure thing," Tail Light puffed out his chest.

"I think they're beautiful," Betty breathed.

"The men are all wearing them," says Tail Light, giving them another husky stretch. "It's a new fad."

"*Good* night!" says Slats in my ear. "If he keeps on doing that the buttons will pop before he gets into the game."

Betty had a lot of advanced ideas.

"Did you ever hold a girl's hand?" says she coyly.

"Your hand reminds me of something that I saw on my Uncle Bob's farm," says Tail Light.

"What?" says Betty quickly, thinking, of course, of a beautiful pond lily, or something like that.

"A white cat," says Tail Light.

"I like cats."

"This one had fits."

"The poor little thing!"

"One day it came up missing," Tail Light recited the whole eloquent story, "and we found it floating in my uncle's swill barrel."

"But you haven't answered my question yet," says Betty.

"What was it?"

"I asked you if you ever held a girl's hand."

Tail Light looked kind of uneasy.

"I guess you're hinting around for me to hold your hand, huh?"

"Of course not," Betty lied convincingly.

Tail Light looked relieved.

"Speaking of hands," says he, "did you ever hold anybody's foot?"

Betty drew herself up.

"Certainly not," says she haughtily.

"I did," Tail Light admitted brazenly.

"A *girl's* foot?"

"She used to be a girl," says Tail Light. "But she's my ma now."

"But what were you doing with her foot?"

"I always hold it for her when she trims her corns."

"Tee! hee! hee!" Betty gurgled. "You're *so* droll."

"When do we eat?" Tail Light then inquired, never suspecting, of course, that we were watching him through the window.

"Oh, in an hour or so," says Betty. Then, having seating herself beside the rubber plant, she sort of smoothed the front of her silk dress. "I've been expecting you to say something nice about my new frock," she gave Lochinvar another cue.

But instead of gracefully kissing her hand, and junk like that, he rubbed his stomach.

"What kind of stuff has your ma fixed up?" he inquired hungrily.

"Sandwiches and pickles and ice cream and cake."

"How many sandwiches apiece?"

"As many as you can eat."

"Peanut butter or ham?"

"Both," says Betty. "But let's not talk about *sandwiches,*" she simpered. "I'd much rather have you talk about *me.*"

"What kind of cake are we going to have?" Tail Light continued the inventory.

"Angel food," says Betty, kind of impatient-like.

"And vanilla ice cream?"

"I think so," came coolly.

"I like it best with peanuts on it. . . . Do you like codfish gravy?"

"No," says Betty, sort of snapping out the word.

"I like it on mashed potatoes. . . . Ever eat blackbird stew?"

"Of course not," the speaker elevated her refined nose.

"The time I ate it I got the stomach ache."

"It's too bad," says Betty frigidly, "that you didn't die."

Slats snickered in my ear.

"Don't ever tell me," says he, "that my kid brother lacks technique."

"He certainly has a way with the ladies," says I, snickering in pattern.

"It's his 'it'," says Friday.

Then we watched sort of breathless-like as Tail Light was drawn into the "platter" game. Nor were we disappointed. Hearing his number called he made a heroic lunge for the spinning platter, his suspender buttons flying in six different directions as he kissed the parlor floor.

After which, as you can imagine, there was

a mixed chorus of boyish giggles and shocked exclamations.

His gorgeous red suspenders having failed him, Tail Light saved himself from complete and everlasting disgrace by clutching the waist band of his sagging pants. Then, with a horrified look on his face, he beat it for the kitchen where Mrs. Sharpe did a neat reconstruction act with the family pincushion.

But the party's star guest was crushed. He showed it in his actions. And satisfied now with our revenge we would have skinned out for home if Friday hadn't stopped us at the door of Mrs. Sharpe's summer kitchen to point out the big birthday cake.

"I dare you to swipe it," says he.

"No," I quickly shook my head.

"Aw, come on," coaxed Slats.

"No," I shook my head again.

"But I thought you wanted to get even with Betty for pitching those old bones at you?"

I did. So in the end I gave in. For it was two against one. And skinning up the alley with the cake we cut it into thirds and ate it.

(Later.) Tail Light just stopped in to tell me about his accident at the party, never sus-

pecting, of course, that I was partly responsible for his disgrace.

But I kicked him out, hardened liar that he was, when he told me that Betty had given him five pieces of her birthday cake. All the birthday cake *he* got you could stick in a gnat's eye.

(Still later.) Oh! Oh! Oh! I just found out that the cake we ate wasn't Betty's birthday cake at all, but a castor-oil cake. Which explains why it had such a queer taste. And which further explains why I have such queer rumbling pains in my stomach.

Half asleep, I jumped out of bed when I heard Mrs. Sharpe's voice downstairs, figuring, of course, that she had come over to our house to complain about me snitching the birthday cake.

"It's late, I know," says the gabby visitor. "But when I saw your light, Mrs. Berg, I washed the spoons and brought them over as quickly as I could. . . . What was that? Oh, yes, the party was a *big* success. And here's a piece of the birthday cake. Betty asked me to bring it over to Trigger. It isn't the same cake, though, that I told you about this morning. Mrs. Camel flavored that one with castor

oil by mistake and had to bake another. Fancy, too, what is liable to happen to the tramp who stole it out of my summer kitchen! I saw the man hanging around our house this afternoon. He had evil eyes. So I don't feel a bit sorry for him."

When my ma came upstairs to bed I told her the truth. For I was scared stiff. I didn't want to snitch the cake, I said. The other fellows sort of talked me into it. And having gotten my story, she put her arms around me, telling me not to worry. The castor oil might keep me busy, she said, but it wouldn't kill me.

## CHAPTER XIII

### BABY STUFF

August 24—When I got up this morning my ma told me that I looked kind of peaked. I sure felt peaked. And to-night I feel worse than ever.

Evidently my pa must have heard about the castor-oil cake, for to-day he sort of grinned every time he looked at me. Thus encouraged I asked him how his rib was, learning that the supposed cracked rib was really nothing more than a bruise.

Oh, yes, I heard some bad news to-day. Friday told me that practically all of our lodge bones have disappeared, Mr. Fish, it seems, having dumped them into an old well in the back of his lot. Next, I suppose, he'll make us give up Dynamite. Blame the luck! And it's all his fault, too—old snooper that he is.

August 25—This morning at Sunday School Slats showed me a letter from the Milwaukee lady.

"What *did* you do to Eggbert?" Mrs. Malcomb wrote in part to Slats' ma. "He's a changed boy. Whenever he finds his temper getting away from him he says 'pickles.' And then he laughs. Please tell me the secret. For I'm burning with curiosity."

But, as Slats says, she'll never learn the truth from us. For Pickles is our buddy now. And buddies don't tell things on each other.

August 26—When Slats came over to my house this morning to start the day's fun he found me playing mumbly-peg on the front lawn.

"I've just been counting them," says he, dropping down beside me on the soft grass.

"What?" says I, flipping my knife over the "fence."

"Our mouse traps," says he.

A sick feeling wedged itself into my stomach.

"For heaven's sake," says I, sort of glaring at him, "don't say another word to me about

those blamed mouse traps. I want to forget that we ever owned them."

"If anybody happens to ask you," says he, "we still own them."

"Talk about the weather," says I.

"Don't be silly," says he. "Those mouse traps are worth money."

Later in the day Friday came over to see me.

"Did you hear about Tail Light?" says he excitedly.

"No," says I. "What happened to him?"

"He fell in a cistern."

"And drowned?"

"No," says Friday. "But he lost three of our mouse traps. They fell out of his pockets."

"For the love of mud!" I yipped. "Can't you and Slats talk about anything else besides mouse traps?"

"Sure thing," he grinned. "Let's go swimming."

Which we did, taking Slats and Tail Light with us. And, bu-lieve me, the old sun sure did pepper us with its heat. My nose looks like a pickled beet. Our swimming hole has a nice soft mud bottom. And to-day we made circus tights by putting mud all over our bodies. Then by jumping into the water we

made the tights disappear. It was fun. But are my shoulders ever sunburned! Ouch!

"I bet you can't guess," says my ma, when she was doping me up to-night with cold cream, "who's coming to visit us."

My first thought was of my Uncle Ben. But when I yipped out his name my ma shook her head.

"It's your Cousin Clara," says she. "And she has a two-year-old baby."

A two-year-old baby!

"*Good* night!" says I. "I'm going camping then."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," says my ma firmly. "For when we have the baby party I'll need you."

I asked her what baby party she meant.

"You'll find out in due time," says she, kind of humming to herself.

"I wish it were my Aunt Nellie," says I, sort of wistful-like, "instead of that old cousin of mine."

"I doubt very much," says my ma, as she slopped the cold cream around, "if your Aunt Nellie will ever spend another night in this house."

"Why not?" says I, disappointed-like. For I sure think a heap of my Aunt Nellie.

"I suppose you've forgotten," says my ma, "how you put a snake in her room the last time she was here."

I stiffened.

"There you go," says I, indignant-like, "telling things on me that aren't true."

"But we found the snake under her bed."

"Just a little bit of a thing," says I scornfully. "And blind, too."

"Nevertheless," says my ma, "it was a snake. And snakes are snakes."

"I had it in my room in a cigar box," I explained. "And it got out."

"Well, don't ever bring another snake in the house. Nor toads, either. Ugh! If there's anything that gives me the cold shivers it's snakes and toads."

Which concludes my diary for to-day. Tomorrow I'm going to the noon train to meet my Cousin Clara and haul her junk home in my coaster wagon. But if she sticks that baby of hers in the coaster I bet you it'll get a lively shaking up. For I never did care much for babies, especially the squawky kind.

We're going to have ice cream for dinner

to-morrow. My ma told me so. I'm glad. For I like ice cream. Sometimes I wish that I owned a magic dish of ice cream on which I could nibble forever without it getting any smaller. It would be pretty swell to have a dish of ice cream like that.

I wonder if the creamery man has mice. Maybe we can trade him a hundred of our mouse traps for a gallon of his ice cream.

Seven hundred mouse traps! Gosh! I don't know what possessed Slats and Friday to start talking about them again.

Anyway, thanks to Tail Light, we have three less.

August 27—My Cousin Clara is here. So is her baby. She calls it Junior. It's an awful squawker. I hope she doesn't stay long. I had two dishes of ice cream for dinner. And when I was lapping up the second dish I overheard my ma tell my Cousin Clara about the coming baby party. The invitations are to be sent out to-morrow morning. Imagine anybody with good sense getting up a *baby* party! As I understand it the party is being given in honor of my Cousin Clara. And my ma is plan-

ning to invite all of her friends who have babies. I still don't see, though, where I get in on it.

August 28—I know everything now. I'm supposed to ride the babies up and down the sidewalk in my coaster wagon while their mas amuse themselves playing cards and gossiping. And I'm supposed to get Friday to help me, too.

August 29—I told Friday to-day about my ma's coming baby party. And did he ever look sick! As he says, taking care of people's babies is worse than going to the dentist.

We had fun to-day at the swimming hole. The mud was swell. Slats made a mud hat. I bet his ma would have seven cat fits if she knew how he plastered mud all over the top of his head. Later we found two bloodsuckers in his hair. We had to pull like sixty to loosen them. A bloodsucker, you know, is a little thing which lives in the mud, under the water, and looks like a piece of raw liver. By sticking its driller into you, mosquito-fashion, it can get a nice hearty meal.

I suppose I won't get a chance to go swimming next Saturday afternoon, which is the time set for the baby party. I suppose I'll have to hang around the house and be baby tender. Boy, I hope it rains that afternoon. For then I won't have to be baby tender. And the rain will make more mud.

August 30—Was I ever surprised to-day when I met Betty Sharpe on the street. For instead of turning up her pug nose at me, as usual, she smiled just as sweet as anything.

"Did you hear about it?" says she.

"What?" says I.

"Bobby," says she.

"Don't tell me," says I, "that he's floating around in somebody else's cistern."

"He—he—" Then she paused. "Maybe," says she, "I shouldn't tell on him."

"Oh, go on," I urged.

"He—he had a dreadful accident at my party. And I'm sorry now that I invited him. For I've found out that he doesn't know much."

"I could have told you that a long time ago," says I.

"I should have invited someone else in his place," says she.

And you should have seen the sweet look I got!

"Slats?" says I.

"*Him?*" the word was spoken scornfully. "I should hope not."

"Friday?" I guessed again.

"Silly! You know very well who I mean."

"I haven't the slightest idea," I lied cheerfully.

"I mean *you.*"

"Oh," says I, pretending that I was about to faint. "This is *so* sudden."

"Is it true," she then inquired, "that your ma is going to have a baby party to-morrow afternoon?"

Ah-ha! So she was fishing around for something.

"I wish I could trade places with you," says she, when I told her about my baby-tending job on the afternoon of the party.

I stared at her.

"Do you really mean it?" says I.

"Of course I do," says she. "I adore babies. So if you need my help just call on me."

I felt ashamed of myself.

"Betty," says I feelingly, "I've acted kind of smart toward you. But I can see now that you're a swell kid."

And I meant it, too.

August 31—I'm very unhappy to-night. I'm up in my room all alone. It's getting dark. My Cousin Clara is so mad at me she won't even speak to me. She hardly speaks to my ma, either. She's going home to-morrow. She says I'm a hoodlum. She means that I'm a tough and a bum and a rowdy. But I'm not. I'm just a victim of feminine treachery, or whatever you call it.

I bet you there isn't another boy in Crocketville who tries harder to be good than me. I never swear or lie or cheat. I never sass my ma or my pa, either. I love them too much to ever want to do that. Why is it then that I'm always getting into scrapes? I can't understand it. It's just my tough luck, I guess.

This morning I cleaned my Comet Coaster for the baby party. We had dinner. And then I put on my Sunday suit. When Friday came over a short time later, pulling his coaster be-

hind him, he, too, was dressed up in his best clothes.

"Well, don't growl at me," says I, when he began complaining about his job. "It isn't my fault."

"Your ma sure had her nerve," says he, "calling on me to help her."

"I suppose she never did anything for you," says I.

"Oh, well," says he, sort of resigned-like, "it won't last forever."

Then we sat down under a tree.

"What worries me a whole lot more than this baby party," says he, "is how we're going to get our money out of those——"

"*Shut up!*" I yelled at him.

He grinned.

"Say, Trigger," says he, "what does C-A-T spell?"

"Cat, of course," says I.

"No," he shook his head. "It spells *mouse trap.*"

And then did he ever give me the laugh! So I quickly made up my mind to let him talk about mouse traps all he pleases. And Slats, too. Anyway, as the leader says, it will be a feather in our cap if we can turn those blamed mouse traps into money.

Well, about two o'clock Mrs. Hibbey came over with her twins; and then Mrs. Borden came. By three o'clock the lawn was speckled with babies. And all of the ladies passed my Cousin Clara's baby around and tickled it under the chin, calling it a "perfect little dear,' and a lot of other mush. It was too sweet for anything, they said. And one old hen who needed to have her eyes tested had the nerve (Gr-r-r-r!) to say that it looked like *me!*

Shortly after three o'clock my ma called me to the porch.

"Now," says she, "we're going to play bridge. So you and Friday can wheel the babies up and down the sidewalk in your coasters. If you're very nice about it I'll see that you receive a double portion of ice cream when we serve the refreshments."

It took us several minutes to load up. I had five squawkers in my coaster and Friday had six. Then, when the parade was on, who should heave into sight but Slats and Tail Light. They were headed for the creek. And when I thought of the fun that was in store for them—fun that was denied us—I felt like dumping those despised squawkers into the nearest sewer.

"I've got an idea," says Slats, when we told him our predicament.

"Dish it out," says Friday.

"Why not give the babies a ride to the swimming hole? It isn't far. And their mas will be too busy playing cards to notice that they aren't in sight. You can have a nice swim. And by hurrying home nobody will be the wiser."

"Oh, no," a voice spoke over the fence. "I wouldn't do that if I were you."

It was Betty Sharpe! Then we caught sight of another girl.

"If you want to go swimming," Betty told me, "leave the babies with us. We'll gladly take care of them for you."

"Hot dog!" says Friday. And down the street we went on the tear. Pretty soon we came to our swimming hole. It looked beautiful and inviting in the sunlight, with a spotted snake swimming lazily from shore to shore and two hungry snapping turtles sitting on a log. In a jiffy we were stripped and in the water.

"Did you have any trouble with them?" I inquired of Betty, when we later picked up the babies at her house.

"Not the slightest," says she.

And I kind of wondered at her peculiar laugh.

"I'll never forget about this," says I, appreciative-like. "And don't be surprised if you find a hunk of licorice on your front porch."

"I adore licorice," says she, with another queer laugh. "And I adore cake, too."

Mrs. Borden was waiting for us when we pulled into the yard.

"My," says she, "what a red face my little darling has." Then she gave a screech. "Why," says she, "this isn't my baby. It's some other baby in my baby's clothes. And its eyebrows and lips are all painted up."

"Nor is this my baby," shrieked Mrs. Bell. "Where is my child—my little precious?"

You never saw such excited women in all your life. First one would grab a baby, sort of looking it over for identification marks. And then another would grab it. As for the babies themselves they almost yelled their heads off.

I saw then what had happened. And I saw, too, why Betty had been so sweet to me. The deceitful thing! Having found out (from Tail Light probably) about us snitching the castor-oil cake, and wanting to get even with us, she had schemed to get hold of the babies, later

using a lip stick on them and switching their clothes.

The party completely broke up when my Cousin Clara found a bloodsucker in her baby's hair. How it got there I don't know, unless one of us shed it. It was then that I was sent upstairs, my ma thinking that Friday and I had switched the babies' dresses. And here I am.

By rights I ought to tell on Betty and make her take the blame. But a fellow hates to tattle on a girl.

## CHAPTER XIV

### HOW I GOT SOCKED

SEPTEMBER 1—Friday has a dose of poison ivy. So he didn't go to Sunday School to-day. His face is all puffed up like a young balloon. He sure looks funny. This afternoon when we were playing tag in his back yard I ran slam-bang into an iron post, knocking out one of my big front teeth. Between the two of us, me with my missing tooth and him with his fat face, we sure are a hot-looking pair. I guess he got poisoned at our swimming hole. For there's a lot of vines where we hang our clothes.

Oh, yes, our house is heaven again. For my Cousin Clara and her squawker left on the noon train. Nor is that the only good news that I have to write down, for I heard to-day that our public school isn't going to start this year till the early part of next month, though usu-

ally it starts immediately after Labor Day. As I understand it one of the walls started sagging a few days ago and it will take the workmen at least four weeks to get it fixed. I should worry if it takes them the rest of the year.

September 2—Friday's face is much better to-day. His ma let him come over and play with me. We had fun. I am learning to squirt water through a hole in my front teeth. I can squirt pretty good for a beginner. The other fellows can't squirt like me because they still have their front teeth. I thought I was kind of unlucky when I got my tooth knocked out. But now I'm glad that it happened.

The way I squirt is like this: First I lap up a quart or two of water, sort of pushing my tongue against the hole to make it smaller. Then, with my cheeks puffed out, balloon-fashion, I skin my teeth and blow to beat the cars. I bet you that in less than a week I'll be the best squirter in town.

September 3—I can squirt lots better to-day than I could yesterday.

September 4—I'm still practicing. And maybe in time I'll get to be the world's champion. I can see a lot of improvement. All it takes is time and plenty of water.

September 5 and 6—I'm still at it.

September 7—Whoopee! I can squirt clean over Mrs. Camel's hen house.

September 8—This morning when my ma was getting me ready for Sunday School she looked at me, as though I kind of hurt her eyes, and sighed.

"Let's hope," says she, fussing with my necktie, "that we have it fixed by next Sunday without fail."

"What?" says I.

"Your tooth," says she. "If I must say so you look terrible."

"*Good* night!" I yipped, kind of panicky-like. "What are you going to do to it?"

"I'm afraid," says she gravely, "that we'll have to buy you a gold tooth."

"Unless I can put it in and take it out," says I quickly, "I don't want it."

"But why should you want to take it out?" says she.

"So that I can squirt."

"*Squirt?*" says she, looking at me curiously. "I still don't understand what you mean."

I told her then how expertly I could squirt through the hole in my front teeth.

"If you fill up the hole with a gold tooth," says I, "all my practicing will have been wasted. And I had planned on being a champion, too."

"Well," says she, kind of dry-like, "we'll talk the matter over with the dentist. And who knows but what he'll be able to supply you with a gold tooth with a hole drilled through it."

Then for no particular reason my thoughts turned to Betty Sharpe. And I found myself wondering if my ma and the other neighbor women had learned the truth about those switched baby clothes. Certainly, any woman with good sense ought to know that it was the work of a girl. But I didn't say anything. For no boy wants to be a tattletale and tell on a girl. Besides, so far as Betty's trick is con-

cerned, we kind of deserved what we got. For I can see now that it wasn't a bit nice of us to snitch her birthday cake, even if it was an old castor-oil cake.

Oof! I sometimes wonder if I'll ever be able to look another cake in the face.

Running down the street I found Slats and Tail Light sitting on the church steps waiting for the preacher to finish his morning sermon. Friday is a Baptist, which explains why he wasn't there. The Baptists are all right, I guess. But I'd rather be a Methodist. For we've got the biggest pipe organ. And our bell has a crack in it.

Pretty soon the three of us went over to the parsonage to get a drink at the preacher's pump, which is an old-fashioned affair with a squeaky iron handle.

"I bet you," says Slats, pointing to the church, "that you can't squirt as high as that window."

"Don't make me laugh," says I, jiggling the pump handle up and down. "For if anybody happens to ask you I'm a real squirter. And with a little extra effort I dare say that I could squirt clean over the whole church, steeple and

all. You must remember," I wound up, "that I've been doing a lot of practicing."

"Talk's cheap," says Slats.

"And you really think," says I, "that I can't squirt as high as that window?"

"Let's see you," says he.

So I loaded up. And I gave a good squirt.

"I knew you couldn't do it," yelled Slats, kind of jeering-like. "You missed by two feet."

I saw right off that my reputation was in danger.

"I'm going to do it," says I grimly, "or bust."

"Look out!" yelled Slats, as I loaded up. "You will bust, and I don't mean maybe, if you puff up like that."

I was all ready now. And I threw back my head and squirted an old gee-whacker of a squirt, never noticing that the window had been raised. And what do you know if I didn't squirt old Deacon Cullpepper plumb on his bald head! Gee!

Old pickle face that he is, and acknowledged to be the town's biggest crab, Deacon Cullpepper can't bear to see boys have fun. And hearing voices at the pump he had come sternly

to the church window to order us away, little suspecting that he was going to get a free shower bath.

It was an accident, of course. I never would have done it purposely, however much I dislike him. But as long as someone in the church had to get it I was glad it was him. For I haven't forgotten how he burned up our football simply because it fell on his side of the fence. That's the kind of an old buzzard *he* is.

Well, having committed the deed, so to speak, I figured that the only sensible thing for me to do was to beat it. So Slats and I legged it around the corner of the parsonage as tight as we could go, Tail Light, of course, trailing behind.

"Oh, gee!" giggled Slats, when we stopped beside the preacher's pansy bed. "That was the funniest sight I ever saw in all my life. You socked him right on the dome."

"Let's hope," says I, kind of anxious-like, "that he didn't recognize me."

Later I saw the old man stomping up and down in front of the church. Thump! thump! thump! went his cane on the concrete sidewalk, which action in itself showed how angry he was. He didn't know for sure, he said, who

the boy was who had squirted him on the head. But it was a boy with a missing front tooth—he had seen that much. After which, as you can imagine, I was mighty careful to keep my mouth shut.

September 9—We went swimming to-day. When I was squirting water I swallowed something. I don't know whether it was a minnow or a bloodsucker. Boy, I sure hope it wasn't a bloodsucker. For I can imagine what it would do to me if it got perched on a nice plump blood vessel on the inside of my stomach.

September 10—I guess it wasn't a bloodsucker. For to-day when Slats accidentally socked me on the snout I seemed to have as much blood as usual. Anyway, I don't believe that a bloodsucker could live very long in a fellow's stomach. For there's too much other truck down there such as mashed potatoes and gravy and beefsteak and fried eggs and pudding and pickles and bread and butter and pie and ice cream and licorice.

September 11—We had another meeting tonight in Friday's barn. It sure was a swell meeting, all right. Friday showed us a new way to skin the cat on his trapeze. And Tail Light had his pockets stuffed with apples. We took turns seeing who could take the biggest bite. Friday won. But, of course, *he* would. For, as I have said before, he has the biggest mouth of any kid in town. Boy, with his big mouth and my missing tooth I bet you that I could squirt clean over the town hall.

Our mouse traps were there in a cracker box. And we had fun setting the traps and poking sticks at them.

Which gave us an idea. And now we're going to get up a new kind of grab bag as a means of getting rid of some of our traps. Oh, baby! I bet we have fun.

There's to be a social in the church parlors this coming Friday night. The superintendent told us about it last Sunday, only I forgot to mention it in my diary. The girls in the senior department are going to have a candy booth. There's to be a fortune teller, too, and other attractions. So, as Slats says, why can't we have a grab bag, charging five cents a grab?

He's going to see the superintendent the

first thing in the morning and learn if it will be all right for us to fix up a grab bag if we give all of our profits to the church. I see no reason why we shouldn't be allowed to do it, for out of every nickel that we take in the church will get three cents. The other two cents will be ours, to pay us for the mouse traps which are to be used in the grab bag.

September 12—We had no trouble getting the superintendent's consent. So to-day we completed our plans. And here's how we're going to work it: We're going to use the small classroom, telling the people that we have a new kind of grab bag in there, letting them in one at a time. Those who come first will stay to see the others shove their hands into the grab bag, which will be fun. We can make it kind of spooky, too, by having a ghost hold the bag and by wrapping colored tissue paper around the electric lights. I'm going to be the ghost. Friday is going to watch the door. And Slats is going to sell tickets.

September 13—I have a big bump on my head. Deacon Cullpepper put it there with his

heavy cane. He sure was mad, all right. It's no credit to a church deacon to lose his temper that way and sock boys on the head with his cane. He should set a better example. Besides, it's no fun for a boy to get socked on the head, even if he is kind of guilty. It's a wonder I didn't get my brains knocked out.

At the social to-night Slats got up on a chair and told the people that he was selling tickets for a new kind of grab bag. We had ghosts and everything, he said, and the church was going to get all the profits. So we got a lot of business. For not only were the people curious to know what was in the grab bag, but they figured that the money was being spent for a good cause.

Mrs. Prouty was at the head of the line. Fat and gabby, she kept saying that she wanted to be the first so that she could get the best grab. That made me laugh. I told myself that she would get a good grab, all right.

Wrapped in a sheet, I told her when she came into the room to put a leather glove on her right hand and try her luck.

"Goodness gracious!" she wheezed. "Do I have to wear a glove?"

"That's the dead pirate's orders," says I, in a graveyard voice.

She tried to peek into the bag.

"Is anything liable to bite me?" says she.

"No, ma'am," says I, in continued ghost style.

"Then you have nothing alive in the bag?" she persisted.

"No, ma'am," says I again.

"Oh, dear!" says she, acting kind of skittish. "I hardly know what to do."

"Please put on the glove and grab," says I. "For the others are waiting."

Well, she finally stuck her gloved hand into the bag, acting as though she was liable to lose her whole arm. And when one of the traps snapped at her fingers she let out a screech that would have stopped a runaway freight train. Out came her hand. And there, clinging harmlessly to one of her gloved fingers, was a mouse trap.

"It's yours," I told her, unsnapping it and handing it to her. Then, telling her to be seated, I hooked the leather glove and handed it to the next grabber.

As I say, we did a lot of business. And the only one who got sore was old Deacon Cull-

pepper. I told him to wear the leather glove. But no boy can tell *him* anything. And did he ever rave when the mouse traps began snapping at his bare fingers!

"So," says he, catching me with a grin on my face, which showed up the hole in my front teeth, "you're the young scoundrel I've been looking for." And before I could duck to save myself he grabbed me by the collar of my ghost outfit and yanked me around, finally socking me on the head with his cane. "I'll teach you," he thundered, "to squirt water on an old man. Take *that* and *that* and *that*."

Which practically put an end to our grab bag business. But we should worry. For we have forty-five less mouse traps.

## CHAPTER XV

### TOADS IN DISGUISE

September 14—You can imagine how disappointed I was this morning when the dentist stuck a solid gold tooth in the front of my mug. I tried to get him to drill a hole through it (meaning the tooth, of course, and not my mug), explaining how necessary the hole was to my squirting career. Without the hole, I said, my promising career would be a scrambled pancake. But he was much too smart to listen to a small boy like me.

Anyway, it's a swell tooth. I never saw a prettier one. And even though it has kept me from getting world famous, like Lindbergh and Tom Swift, I'm kind of proud of it.

"Will it always stay shiny?" says I, when the dentist gave me a peek at myself in a little hand mirror.

"It will," says he, "if you use a toothbrush on it."

Which I intend to do. And won't Betty Sharpe's eyes pop out when she sees it! Boy, I bet you she'll eat out of my hand now.

Coming down the stairs from the dentist's office I bumped into Slats and Tail Light.

"We've been looking all over town for you," says Slats.

"You didn't look in the right place," says I, falling into step with them.

"Been having a nerve killed?" the leader inquired, noticing the dentist's sign over the door.

I skinned my teeth.

"Golly Ned!" says he, letting out his neck. "Is it solid gold?"

"It looks like brass to me," says Tail Light, fishing in his pocket for something to eat.

"As though anybody cares what *you* think," I shot back at him.

"How much did it cost?" says Slats.

"Twenty-two bucks," says I proudly.

"Wough!" says Slats.

And then he laughed.

"What's the joke?" says I.

"I was just wondering," says he, "if you couldn't induce the dentist to take part of his pay in mouse traps."

"I might try it," says I, "if I had to pay the bill myself. But that's my pa's grief."

Here Tail Light dropped a gunny sack that he had been carrying. And maybe you think there wasn't some lively stepping among the ladies who were passing up and down the busy street when a dozen or more big frogs hopped into sight.

"What are you going to do with them?" says I, when the frogs had been returned to their sack.

"Sell 'em," was Slats' short reply.

As though I'd believe that!

"Let me tell one," says I.

"I mean it," says he.

And then he showed me a newspaper clipping which told how two boys living near Chicago had cleaned up more than sixty dollars apiece by selling frog legs to road-house proprietors.

"If they can do it," says he, starting off in the direction of Friday's house, "we can do it."

We found Friday in his front yard driving a wooden plug into the drain of an old cast-iron bathtub.

"It's our aquarium," says Slats, unloading the frogs and reaching for a pail of water.

The old tub aroused my curiosity.

"Where did you get it?" I inquired of Friday, as we gazed at the tub.

"In the town dump," says he. "I just lugged it home on my coaster wagon."

"And while he was doing that," says Slats, "Tail Light and I were down by the river sleuthing frogs."

"Old Charley's marsh is jammed full of them," piped up Tail Light. "I bet we could have caught a million."

"And how much do you expect to get for them?" says I.

"Ten cents apiece," says Slats.

Ten times a million!

"Do I get in on it?" says I eagerly.

"Absolutely and nothing else but," says Slats.

The bathtub made a swell store, or whatever you want to call it, only Mrs. Fish acted kind of peeved when she saw it in her front yard. She tried to make us move it into the barn out of sight. But Friday talked her down. We were frog merchants, he said. And to sell our goods we had to keep them on display, the same as other merchants.

Later we put up a big sign. Here it is:

## FROGS FOR SALE

Miss Tidy Sweet came tripping down the street.

"Laws-a-me!" says she, squinting first at the sign and then at the frogs. "Whoever heard of anybody selling frogs?"

"Frog legs fried in butter," says Slats, dumping another pail of water into the tub, "are considered a great delicacy in the city."

Up went Miss Tidy Sweet's thin nose to the level of her eyebrows.

"I'd as soon eat toads," says she, marching on her way.

Then who should heave into sight but the Crooker gang. And did they ever jeer at us when they saw our sign! Which, as you can imagine, made us hate them worse than ever. For Tony Crooker in particular is a bum. He tells around town that he can lick me. But I'd like to see him try it.

To Slats' disappointment (it being his scheme), we took in not a single penny this afternoon. And when evening came we dejectedly lugged the bathtub to Friday's screened-in porch, realizing that his ma wouldn't want the tacky-looking tub standing

on her lawn over Sunday. Besides, after some of the threats that Tony Crooker shoved at us we were afraid to leave the frogs where he could get at them. The dirty bum! He *would* like to bust up our business. Not that it's anything to brag on. But you can bet your Sunday shoes we aren't giving up anything to him.

I saw Betty Sharpe this evening at the picture show. And when I skinned my teeth at her she just giggled. Maybe that little sneak of a Tail Light told her that my new tooth is brass. If he did I'll sock him.

September 15—Headed for Sunday School this morning I saw an old lunker of a bullfrog sort of squinting at me through the tall grass beside the road. Grabbing him I looked around for a can to put him in, figuring that I could pick him up on the way home. And failing to find a can I finally dumped him into my coat pocket.

During class I kept my hand in my pocket so that the prisoner couldn't escape. And then what do you know if the superintendent didn't ask me to take up the class collections! Gosh! Any other time I would have been tickled pink.

For I don't mind being noticed. But I wasn't tickled pink to-day. I guess not! For I was scared to death that the frog would get out of my pocket.

Well, I started out with the collection plate. And everything was lovely until Mrs. Prouty, in the senior class, went to put her dime on the plate and skidded. I made a grab for the dime, forgetting about the frog, which jumped clean out of my pocket, sort of landing head-on in her fat lap. Golly Ned! If screeching could have raised that church roof it would be half-way to the moon by this time. Then she gave the frog a flip and shot it through the air, smacking old Deacon Cullpepper plunk in the face. I tried to hold in. But in spite of myself I snickered right out. For you know how I love Deacon Cullpepper, especially after what happened to me last Friday night. Then the frog landed in Mrs. Hibbey's lap, which, of course, set *her* to screeching.

I don't blame the superintendent for getting peeved. For it was an awful thing to have happen right in church. But it wasn't my fault, as I told him when he started jumping on me. It was purely an accident, I said. But he wouldn't believe me.

September 16—Whoopee! I guess the frog scheme isn't such a dud after all. For the chances are that the local hotel proprietor will give us a nice fat order, as he is getting up a swell banquet for the Crocketville Commercial Club, of which my pa is the secretary.

"I suppose," says my ma, when she and my pa were discussing the Tuesday night supper, "that you will have all kinds of good things to eat."

"Sure thing," says my pa. "Everything from soup to nuts, including fried frog legs."

Right then is when I pricked up my ears.

"Where are you going to get the frogs?" says I.

"Oh," says he, "I dare say the hotel proprietor will hire some boys to catch them in the marsh by old Charley Robin's house."

"Maybe you can speak a good word for us," says I eagerly.

"Meaning which?" says he, realizing, of course, who I meant by "us."

"We've already got forty-four frogs in an old bathtub on Friday's front porch," says I.

"Yes," spoke up my ma, "I heard about those frogs. Mrs. Fish says they were hopping all over the house when she and her husband

got home from the movie last Saturday night. So she made Friday and his pa lug them to the barn, tub and all."

"How many did you say you had?" my pa then inquired.

"Forty-four," says I. "And they're great big fellows, too."

"That being the case," says he, "I'd advise you to go down to the hotel and talk with the proprietor."

Beating it down the street to Friday's house I was told by his ma that he and his pa had left town at daybreak for Echo Lake, eighteen miles away. Nor could I get into the locked barn where the frogs were, for Friday had the key. However, the hotel proprietor told me that if our frogs were as big and fat as I said he'd gladly buy them from us.

September 17. We sold all of our frogs this morning, only Friday doesn't know about it yet as he and his pa aren't due to return till the end of the week. I suppose they'll come home with a big string of black bass and pickerel. For Mr. Fish is well named, all right, fishing

being his chief hobby. Nor is Friday so slow when it comes to jiggling a reel around.

Slats and I finally got into the barn this morning through an alley window.

"Look!" says the leader, when we were dipping up the frogs with an old petticoat of Mrs. Fish's. "Here's a queer looker. I don't remember catching him."

"And here's another," says I.

Slats did some close squinting.

"If those are frogs," says he, "they must have changed color when they got caught in the parlor last Saturday night."

"Frogs do change color," says I. "I read about it in a book."

"All right," says Slats. "In they go."

After which we hurried down the street to the hotel.

"And what will you take to dress them for me?" says the proprietor, when we delivered the frogs to him.

"Show us how," says Slats, pocketing the four dollars and forty cents, "and we'll do it for nothing."

"It's humane," the proprietor then demonstrated, "to first kill the subject by knocking it on the head, like this. Then you cut off the

hind legs—see? If you hold the legs properly you can skin them in one operation."

The job took us about three quarters of an hour, after which we headed for the nearest ice cream parlor to refresh ourselves, buying a malted milk apiece.

"Well, did you sell your frogs?" says my pa this evening, when he was getting ready for the banquet.

"Sure thing," says I.

"How much did you make?" says he.

"A dollar and ten cents apiece," says I.

"That's the stuff," says he, patting me on the head. "The world admires industrious boys."

September 18—I guess you'll understand how terrible I feel to-night when I tell you that some of the frogs that we sold to the hotel proprietor weren't frogs at all but big toads.

Crawling into the barn window ahead of us, Tony Crooker swiped four of our frogs, leaving toads in their place. And, as I say, we sold the toads for frogs; their legs were fried along with the frog legs; and somebody ate them.

If Tony had kept his mouth shut no one would

have been the wiser. For neither the hotel cooks nor the men who ate the fried toad legs knew the difference. But it was too good to keep, Tony thought. And when his pa heard about it he came tearing over to our house last night to get the particulars.

"Great balls of fire!" says he, getting me out of bed. "You didn't really sell those toads, did you, young fellow?"

"What toads?" says I, unable at first to get the drift of his excited gab.

"Why," says he, "the four toads that my Tony put in your bathtub."

"We fished up four funny lookers," says I, beginning to feel faint.

"They were toads," says he.

Then, learning that the toad legs had gone into the frying pan with the frog legs, he lit out for the hotel to stop the banquet, fearful that it would end up in a funeral.

But when he got there the waiters were bringing in the pie and ice cream.

My pa was pretty reasonable with me. For he saw that I wasn't to blame. Anyway, he was sure, he said, that it was frog legs that *he* ate.

September 19—The business men still look kind of sick, Slats' pa even complaining of a queer warty feeling in the pit of his stomach.

September 20—The undertakers are still waiting for their first case.

September 21—Oh, baby! Little old Friday brought the sunshine out of the dark clouds when he came home this morning.

"Rats!" says he, when we gloomily told him about the fried toad legs. "Those weren't toads that you sold to the hotel man. They were Echo Lake frogs. You didn't know it, but last Monday night my pa and I drove back to Crocketville to get a special reel. And having caught four big frogs at the lake, where we put up at my Aunt Maggie's house, I brought them along. As for the toads, when I saw them in the tub I threw them out."

## CHAPTER XVI

### INKSPOT HELPS US OUT

SEPTEMBER 22—This being Sunday I got another dose of soap and water, after which my ma dolled me up and started me off to Sunday School.

"Please remember to wipe your nose," says she, following me to the door. "And for heaven's sake don't pick up any more frogs."

"After the mess we got into at the hotel," says I, "I've kind of lost my interest in frogs. So you needn't worry about me."

"I can't blame you for what the frog did in church last Sunday," says she, having no doubt heard the whole story from someone who was there. "But I do blame you for putting the frog in your pocket."

"We were in the frog business then," says I.

"Yes; I know. But please don't do it again."

"I won't," I promised.

"And when I speak of frogs," says she, "I mean toads, too, and snakes. You must never take anything like that to Sunday School."

"I won't," I promised again.

"Have you discontinued your frog business?" she then inquired.

"We had to," I told her. "For no one around here would patronize us, after what happened."

"And what became of your bathtub?" she further inquired.

"Oh," says I, "we're saving it."

"Well," says she quickly, "I won't feel a bit slighted if you save it at Friday's house instead of over here. For we've got enough of your truck scattered around the premises to start a junk yard."

"We're going to paint the bathtub yellow," says I. "And maybe, if we can mix up the right kind of drugs, we'll start giving mineral baths."

"Good heavens!" says she. "You can think of *more* things to do."

"When everything's ready," says I, "we're going to try it out on Tail Light."

"I'd advise you," says she, "to try it out on Dynamite instead."

Which, I thought, was a dumb thing for her

to say. For what if Dynamite, who has been living a rather quiet life lately in Friday's back yard, should lose his hair, or something? But it was time for Sunday School to start. So, instead of prolonging the conversation, I lit out for the church.

Our lesson to-day was about an old-timer named Jonah who put on a disappearing act with a big fish, which, the teacher told us, undoubtedly was a whale. Later, we were told, the whale got tired of carrying a free passenger around and coughed him up, Jonah then making a record of his unusual ocean voyage for the Bible. It's hard to believe that kind of truck. But I suppose it must be so if it's in the Scriptures.

September 23—Friday ought to have his block knocked off. For what do you know if he didn't creep up on me this morning when I was polishing my new gold tooth on the back porch and scare the liver out of me. Now my toothbrush is as bald as old Deacon Cullpepper (Friday says he heard the bristles snap when my teeth came together) and I have a hairy feeling in my stomach.

When Slats heard about the toothbrush accident he said I ought to swallow some hair tonic. That would make the bristles grow, he said, and then I could be a side-show freak and earn a lot of jack.

I suppose he *would* like to see me sitting on a side-show platform with ten-foot bristles sticking out of my mug. But he'll have a long time to wait.

September 24—We had a special meeting tonight in Friday's barn. And, as usual, Slats did the most of the talking.

"As you fellows know," says he, "we've got six hundred and fifty-two mouse traps on our hands. They cost us two cents apiece. And I think it's high time that we turned them into good old American cash."

"One time at a show," piped up Tail Light, "I saw a magician turn a rabbit into an American flag."

"I'm not talking about magic," says Slats. "I'm talking business."

"Anyway," says Tail Light, "it was a swell show. And I got in for nothing."

"What did you do?" says Friday. "Take part in the trained-pig act?"

But that was too deep for Tail Light.

"Haw! haw! haw!" says he. "That's a good one on you. For there wasn't any trained-pig act. All the magician had was rabbits and eggs."

Then Slats went on with his gab.

"I'll never rest easy," says he, "till we get rid of those mouse traps. For they're about as useful to us as a Victrola would be in a deaf-and-dumb asylum."

After which we indulged in considerable skull practice, finally hitting on a scheme. Oh, baby! I bet we have fun working it.

September 25—This morning Slats and I paid old Charley another visit.

"I notice," says Slats, "that you're keeping a pig this year."

"Yep," waggled the old boatman, as he took out his false teeth and cleaned them on the seat of his pants. "I figured that I might jest as well put my garbage into somethin' that would do me some good. Bought him early last spring. And when that rainy spell come I kep' him in the house. Which kind of sp'iled him. For now he wants to stay in the parlor all the time. And *smart!* He knows every-

thing I say to him. Hear him squealin' over there in his pen? *He* knows that I'm talkin' 'bout him. And he's coaxin' me to let him out so that he kin come to the house."

Then, to demonstrate, the old man opened the pen. And sure enough the pig, which weighed around a hundred pounds, made a bee line for the kitchen door.

Slats looked at me out of the corner of his eye and grinned.

"Do you ever let him sleep with you?" he inquired of the old man.

"Not any more," the boatman shook his head. "But when he was a little feller I used to tuck him in at the foot of my bed."

He sure was a swell pig, all right.

"What's his name?" says Slats.

"Wa-al," grinned the old man, "I christened him Oliver Twist, figurin' that the 'Twist' part kind of matched his tail. But since he took to runnin' out of the pen I've changed his name to Inkspot."

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Slats. "That's a good one."

Told then that we were getting up a program, in which we needed a pig for the feature act, old Charley deliberated several minutes before he would agree to lend us his pet.

"You're sure," says he, searching our faces, "that you won't mistreat him."

"All we're going to do," says Slats frankly, "is to grease him up and let the kids try to catch him."

"I swan!" cackled the old man. "I kin see now why you want to borry him. And as he needs a good greasin' anyway I'm half inclined to let you take him, figurin', of course, that you'll be good to him, as you say."

So, dumping the squealing porker into a gunny sack, and loading him into Slats' coaster, we lit out for Friday's barn, where we later put up a big sign. Here it is:

**CAN YOU CATCH A PIG?**

If you can catch our pig we'll pay you twenty-five cents in cash. It costs only five cents to enter the contest, and you get a beautiful hand-painted mouse trap absolutely free. The contest will start at two o'clock this afternoon. Come and see the fun.

"And you're sure," says Friday, "that the pig has a lot of pep?"

"All pigs have pep," says Slats.

"We'll be out of luck," says Friday, "if he lets the kids catch him."

"Shucks!" says Slats. "You needn't worry about the kids catching *him*. For even if they got hold of him none of them would be able to hang on."

"That's so," I told Friday. "For one time I saw a greased-pig race at the county fair."

Having posted the sign we then got the barn fixed up, sort of making an "arena," as the leader called it, in the middle of the room. By using boxes and boards we rigged it so that the pig would be shut in, the walls of the arena itself serving as elevated seats for the audience.

And then did Inkspot ever squeal when we started greasing him up immediately after dinner, old Charley having told us what kind of grease to use. It was a lucky thing for us, all right, that Friday's ma was attending an afternoon party on the other side of town. The kids who had read our advertising came running from a dozen different directions, all eager to see the fun. And with everything now set for the contest I went outside and made a spiel.

"Ladies and gents," says I, in regular showman style, "we are about to start our big pig-catching contest. There's our advertising," I pointed. "It tells the whole story. And now

that the hour of the contest has arrived, who will be the first lucky boy to pay me five cents for a ticket and win a quarter of a dollar?"

Pretty soon Bob Kinzel forked over a nickel. And getting his mouse trap he went inside and started chasing the pig. But little old Inkspot was too lively for him. All he got for his hard work was a bruised nose, where he kissed the barn floor, and greasy hands. Finally he gave it up.

And then did he ever laugh when another kid came in and tried it. We laughed, too. Which all helped, of course, to separate the other kids from their nickels.

Betty Sharpe was there.

"Do girls have to pay?" says she, thinking of course, that if she google-eyed me she could get in for nothing.

"How about it?" I yelled to Slats. "Do we charge ten cents for girls?"

"Aw," says Slats, giving me the wink, "let them in for six."

"I'll *never* pay six," says Betty spunkily. "For it says over there in your advertising that it's only five cents."

"All right then," I grinned. "Plunk down your five cents and go inside."

"I don't think you're a bit nice," says she, still hanging onto her fortune.

"How would it be," says I, "if I kissed one of the mouse traps? Would that make it worth five cents to you?"

"Silly!"

Then, as I spit at a grasshopper, she kind of caught her breath.

"Oh! . . ." she cried. "When did you get the new gold tooth?"

"Recently," says I coolly.

"It's beautiful," says she.

"I suppose," says I, "that you never noticed it the other night at the picture show."

"I remember seeing you there," says she. "And once I thought you were trying to sneeze and couldn't."

Huh!

"I hear, too," says she, "that you're writing a book."

"Yes," says I, sort of unconcerned-like, "my second one."

"How wonderful," she breathed. "Is it about me?"

"Well," I admitted, beginning to feel kind of uneasy, "part of it is about you. But I hope you never see it."

"If *you* wrote it," she looked at me with her soul in her eyes, "I'd walk to the end of the world to see it."

It was high time, I figured, to get rid of her.

"Maybe I should tell you the truth," says I.

"What?" says she eagerly.

"I'm letting someone else wear my horse-shoe-nail ring," says I.

"Who?" says she.

"The fat widow on Elm Street," says I, "who has the triplets."

Up went her pug nose.

"Huh!" says she, dropping her nickel and grabbing a ticket.

Then who should heave into sight, stepping high and important, but old Deacon Cullpepper himself, having been attracted to the barn, I guess, by the racket.

"Are you boys mistreatin' that poor pig?" says he, when he had read our advertising.

"Of course not," says I.

"I've got a good notion," says he, "to buy a ticket and see for myself."

"You'd better have another notion," says I, "and go home. For there aren't any tickets left."

"You're tryin' to keep me out," he scowled.

"Which in itself proves that you're doin' things in there that you shouldn't. So stand out of my way. For I'm going in."

Nor could I stop him. For when I tried it he shoved me halfway across the alley. *Mad?* Say, I could have chewed tenpenny nails. I guess, though, that I would have been tickled instead could I have known what was going to happen. Gosh! It sure was bully.

Striding into the barn, just as though he owned it, the old meddler didn't climb onto a seat, like the others, but stood in the center of the arena where the pig was. Bub Vold was chasing it, determined to be the first one to earn a quarter. And pretty soon the pig ran between the deacon's long legs, upsetting him in a heap. Jumping to his feet, his eyes spitting fire, he shoved Bub out of the way and started after the pig, flourishing his cane.

"Go for him, Deak," yelled one of the kids.

"Grab him by the tail, Deak," yelled another.

"Spit on your hands, Deak," came from a third.

The audience sure was getting its money's worth, all right.

"Keep it up, Deak," yelled the kids. "Don't weaken."

"GIT OUT OF MY WAY," YELLED THE DEACON.

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"Consarn his ugly hide," the old man panted, throwing aside his cane and grabbing with both hands. "I'll git him, by cracky, if it takes me till doomsday."

Here one of the boxes collapsed, opening a path to the door. And before I could head him off Inkspot was halfway home.

"Git out of my way," yelled the deacon, tearing through the door. I saw him disappear down the alley. And then there was an awful mix-up on Main Street when he and the pig ran into a bunch of church ladies.

To-night at the supper table I heard my pa tell my ma that there was some talk going around town about Deacon Cullpepper abusing dumb animals.

"Yes," says my ma, "I heard all about it from the lady who lives next door to the Fish family."

And then she looked at me!

But she didn't tattle on me. Anyway, as I could have explained to her, it wasn't my fault that the meddlesome old deacon disgraced himself. I told him to keep out of the barn. But he wouldn't listen to me.

Having sold fifty-two tickets our supply of mouse traps has been cut down to an even six

hundred. Nor did we have to pay out a single quarter, either. For Inkspot, who later was returned to his pen, had a system of his own when it came to ducking and dodging.

## CHAPTER XVII

### UNCLE JUPE

SEPTEMBER 26—Friday gave our bathtub a coat of yellow paint last night before he turned in. And hoping that the paint would be dry this morning I skinned over there as soon as I got up, finding the tub occupied by an old man with a blunt red nose and bushy chin whiskers.

His cane and baggy umbrella stood upright beside the tub, the umbrella's handle forming a rack for his rusty-looking derby. And for a pillow he was using one of Mr. Fish's rubber boots stuffed with old newspapers.

" 'Tain't the first time that I've slep' in a bathtub," he piped in a cracked voice, when I woke him up.

"Who are you?" I inquired curiously.

But before he could answer Mrs. Fish came flying into the barn.

"Why, Uncle Jupe!" she cried in amazement. "Where in the world did *you* come from?"

"Oh," chuckled the old man, with a pleased look in his watery blue eyes, "I arrived in the middle of the night. And finding all of the doors locked and everybody in bed I figured I'd better bunk in the barn."

Mrs. Fish saw what a mess his clothes were in at the first glance.

"Goodness gracious!" she cried. "You don't mean to tell me that you actually slept in the bathtub?"

"I could 'a' had a worser bed," nodded the old man.

"But Ronald just painted it last evening."

Told then that his clothes were daubed with yellow paint, the visitor looked kind of sick, later making his appearance in an old suit of Mr. Fish's.

"Where does he live?" says Slats, wh . the stoop-shouldered visitor pottered into sight on the back porch.

"Here, there and everywhere," says Friday.

"Meaning which?" says Slats.

"Never having had a wife or family," says Friday, "he leads a sort of 'rolling-stone' life,

living first in one country and then in another. Last year, so he tells us, he was in China."

"What does he do?" Slats further inquired. "Bum his way?"

"Partly," says Friday.

"He looks poor," says I.

"I heard him tell my ma," says Friday, "that he has over three hundred dollars in his pocketbook. So he probably could buy better clothes if he wanted to."

"If he has that much money," laughed Slats, thinking of how the old geezer had crawled into the freshly painted bathtub, thus ruining his clothes, "he ought to have his head repaired."

"I can't deny that he's dumb," says Friday soberly. "But let's not make fun of him. For he's an old man."

September 27—Whoopee! Uncle Jupe blowed himself this morning and bought Friday a horse. Not a toy horse, either but a real one, with a tail at one end and ears at the other. Of course, he's pretty old; and his back is kind of caved in; but he's a swell horse, just the same.

"His name is Pancake," says the old man,

when he led the lop-eared, droopy-acting gray horse into the yard where Friday and I were greasing our Comet Coasters. "And I bought him for you, Ronald."

"Hot dog!" says Friday, forgetting all about his coaster.

I helped him lead the old horse into the barn.

"It will be fun," says he, as we jiggled the currycomb up and down the bony legs, "to own a real horse."

"It will be fun, all right," I laughed, "to own *this* horse."

For old Pancake with his high hip bones and hammock-like back sure was a funny looker!

Then Slats and Tail Light came on the run.

"Where did you get him?" says Slats, when he had approvingly looked Pancake up one side and down the other.

"My Uncle Jupe bought him for me," says Friday.

"I bet he cost a lot of money," says Slats.

"Fourteen dollars," says Friday proudly.

"What are you going to feed him?" says Tail Light.

Friday hadn't thought of that.

"Let's cut some grass," says he.

Which we did. And when Pancake had

nicely refreshed himself on four bushels of fresh grass flavored with leaves, Friday got a stepladder and climbed aboard.

I looked up at him kind of envious-like.

"How is it?" says I.

"Swell," says he, balancing himself on the horse's knobby rear end.

"Let's all try it," says Slats eagerly.

But that didn't work out for two cents. For we kept sliding downhill into the hollow of Pancake's back.

"I've got an idea," says Slats. "Let's fasten a board on his back, sort of bridging the hollow place, and all straddle the board."

But we were too much of a load for old Pancake, I guess. For at every corner we had to jump down and brace him from both sides to keep him from squatting in the middle of the street.

September 28—We chipped in to-day and bought Pancake a bushel of corn and some marshmallows. But he looked dumber than ever when we tried to teach him tricks. I was told at home that he's too old to learn new

tricks. Which probably is true. For it's a fact his bones sort of rattle when he walks. Still, as I say, he's a swell horse.

September 29—We rode Pancake to Sunday School to-day. And while we were inside he got loose, chewing the leaves off the preacher's rubber plant and ruining a grass porch rug. Uncle Jupe is going to pay the damages. I never knew, though, that horses ate rubber plants. Still, Pancake is no ordinary horse. He shows that by his looks.

September 30—Pancake put in a bad night, the rubber plant having upset his stomach. We sat up with him till after midnight. It was pitiful the way he rolled his eyes at us and groaned. Wanting to help him, we massaged his stomach with the currycomb. Then we got a hotwater bottle. But it was like putting a postage stamp on the side of a house. We gave him what was left of Dynamite's Peruna, too, which reminds me that we never got a reply from our testimonial. But I should worry.

October 1—Pancake was able to stand up to-day. And were we ever tickled! For we want to go camping. And it will be fun to hitch him to our coaster wagons and make him pull us.

October 2—We have our tent and other camping stuff all packed. And to-day my ma cooked a boiled ham for us. We have a big dish of beans, too, baked by Friday's ma, and a lot of other good things. I guess, though, that we haven't a bit too much. For Uncle Jupe, who is going with us, has a terribly big appetite.

And I want to tell the world, too, that he has terribly big feet. When he shuffles across the room it sounds like someone dragging in a trunk. He buys his shoes big, I've been told, because he has bunions.

October 3—Oh, dear; I'm so tired to-night I don't know whether I'm dead or alive. We've put in an awful day. And all on account of that old uncle of Friday's. If I must say so he's the dumbest thing that ever walked on

two legs. When I first met him I kind of liked him. But, bu-lieve me, I'm getting bravely over it. I used to think that Tail Light was the limit. But he's a pinnacle of brilliance, or whatever you call it, as compared with this bunion-footed bathtub hound of the Fish family's.

Piling out of bed this morning at sunrise we met at Friday's house and loaded up, the coaster wagons having been hitched together like a train of cars. Old Pancake, of course, was the locomotive. Down the streets we went, singing and laughing. Then, crossing the river bridge, we headed into the country, Slats having a particular spot in mind on the bank of a creek several miles away.

Friday and I were in the first coaster with the boiled ham and other truck tucked in behind us. Next came Uncle Jupe riding on the folded tent. Then came a load of provisions. And finally Slats and Tail Light.

Used to lying in bed till eight o'clock, Uncle Jupe could hardly keep his eyes open. And when we finally arrived at the camp site he took off his big shoes and went to sleep under a bush, fixing a handkerchief over his mouth to keep out the bugs. But he was up and around when the call came for dinner.

"Have a sandwich," says Friday, shoving the loaded plate across the flat-topped stump that we were using for a table.

Uncle Jupe sighed sort of contented-like as he hooked one of the biggest sandwiches and bit into it. Then a sort of blank look crossed his wrinkled face.

"I kain't eat it," says he, sort of whining-like. "Fur I hain't got no lower teeth."

We stared at him.

"What!" cried Friday. "Did you forget to bring your false teeth along?"

"Last night," says Uncle Jupe, "I put my teeth in the bedroom closet. And in the hustle and bustle this mornin' I plumb furgot all about 'em."

Friday gave a weary groan when told that unless he went home and got the needed teeth his uncle would starve to death. After which we got up and put the sandwiches away. For it wasn't right for us to eat in front of Uncle Jupe if he couldn't join in. I felt pretty lank. But I figured that I could stand it for another two or three hours.

"Why don't you ride old Pancake?" says I, when Friday spoke of hoofing it into town.

"I'd like to," says he. "But I'm not so sure

that I could handle him all alone if he got one of his lazy spells."

"Put the board saddle on him," says I, "and I'll go with you."

Uncle Jupe limped over to where we were.

"Mebbe," says he, "you better git me some bunion salve when you're in town. Fur my right foot in partic'lar hurts me so I kin hardly stand on it."

"Have you got any bunion salve in your room?" says Friday.

"I calc'late you'll find some if you look around."

"And where will we find your teeth?" says Friday.

"I keep 'em in the closet in my coffee mill."

"What coffee mill?" says Friday.

"It's one I bought fur your ma at a second-hand store," says Uncle Jupe. "Got it cheap, too. But she always buys her coffee ground, she told me. So I put the mill in my closet."

It was two o'clock when we came to Friday's house. And finding the doors locked we crawled through a cellar window. But when we ran up the stairs to Uncle Jupe's room the coffee mill was nowhere in sight.

Then Friday's pa came in.

"Where's ma?" says Friday quickly.

"Oh," says Mr. Fish, "she's working for the church, as usual."

Told then that a rummage sale was going on in the church basement we saw right off where the coffee mill had disappeared to.

"Yes," says Mrs. Fish, when we cornered her at the church. "I sold the coffee mill ten minutes after it was put on sale."

"But surely," says Friday, looking at her hopefully, "you saved the teeth."

"What teeth?"

"Uncle Jupe's," says Friday. "They were parked in the coffee mill drawer."

"Well, I'm sorry," says Mrs. Fish. "But you can't blame me if the teeth were sold along with the coffee mill. For no one but a stupid old man would put his teeth in a place like that."

Told by another lady that the coffee mill had been sold to a farm woman by the name of Daniels who lived five miles east of town on the county-line road, we then went outside where Pancake was trying his best to eat up a wooden hitching post.

"Well," says Friday, sort of weak-like, "what shall we do now?"

"What else can we do," says I, "but keep going?"

For certainly I didn't want poor Uncle Jupe to starve to death.

So, separating Pancake from what was left of the hitching post (and you should have seen how longingly he looked back at it when we started off!), we wearily climbed into our wooden saddle and headed for the country.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE MISSING TEETH

October 3 (*Continued*)—Friday and I didn't do much talking. For we were both tuckered out. And then when we were about four miles from town we caught sight of a girl in a blue dress.

"I bet her little heart will thump," I told my companion, "when she sees you."

"Um . . ." says he, puffing out his chest. "And just my size, too."

"I wonder how we look," says I, "riding on a rail?"

"Sh-h-h-h!" says he, as the walker signaled to us. "She wants us to stop so that she can get a better look at us."

"Have you boys been down the road very far?" the girl inquired, thinking, I guess, that we were a couple of little country jakes out riding for our health.

"We came all the way from town," says Friday.

"Did you notice anything lying in the road?" says the girl.

Friday nudged me in the ribs.

"Sure thing," says he. "We saw a dead cat with a monogram on its tail and an old inner tube autographed by Mr. Firestone."

"I'm searching for a coffee mill," the girl told us.

I thought Friday would stare his eyes out.

"A *which?*" says he, leaning forward.

"A coffee mill," the girl repeated.

"Don't tell me," says Friday, looking kind of dizzy, "that *your* uncle lost his false teeth, too."

"I'm not talking about false teeth," says the girl stiffly. "I'm talking about a coffee mill. My mother bought it at a rummage sale in Crocketville. And it fell out of our buggy on the way home."

Friday sort of collapsed in his seat.

"The end of a perfect day," says he, weak-like.

Then the girl's kid brother came into sight.

"Ma wants you to come home," he yelled.

"What's the matter?" says the girl.

"Mrs. Pippinhill just told us over the phone that she's got our coffee mill at her house. She saw it fall out of the buggy."

"And still the lamp of hope sheds its promising beacon o'er our mottled pathway," recited Friday, sort of dramatic-like. After which we put on a turntable act in the middle of the country road and started back in the direction of the Pippinhill farmhouse, the girl and boy snickering when they got a better look at our crazy saddle.

"Let's give them an eyeful," says Friday.

So we stood up on the board, sort of balancing ourselves, artistic-like, on our toes. And Friday, the big monkey, even stood on his head.

But were we ever disappointed when we stopped at the first farmhouse, having sort of identified its owner by the name on the mail box. For the farmer's wife told us that the desired coffee mill was on its way across the fields to the other farmhouse.

"My boys wanted to go over there," says she. "So I thought they might just as well take the coffee mill along."

"*Good* night nurse!" groaned Friday, when we were back on the road. "All we do is chase around."

"Shucks!" says I. "Don't lose your grit now. For it isn't more than a mile to the Daniels farmhouse."

But when we got there the Daniels family told us that as yet they had seen nothing of the Pippinhill kids.

Friday draped himself weakly on Pancake's big head.

"Bury me under my ma's favorite pansy tree," says he feebly, "and water my grave with sauer-kraut juice."

Mrs. Daniels looked at him and smiled, then turned to me.

"What's the matter with him?" says she curiously.

"Oh," says I, "he's just rehearsing for a death scene."

"There'll be a death scene, all right," laughed the girl, "if he keeps on riding horses upside down."

Told then why we were so anxious to overtake the elusive coffee mill, the farm woman pointed across the fields to a rickety old house.

"It's halfway between here and the Pippinhill farm," says she. "And as it has the reputation of being haunted I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the Pippinhill boys are fooling

around there. For such places attract boys."

"How do you get there?" says Friday, in a do-or-die voice.

"I'll show you," says the girl quickly, later opening a gate for us. She told us, too, that the former owner of the house, an old miser, had killed himself by jumping into his deep well. So, kind of excited, we hurried down the lane. And sure enough when we came to the old house we heard kids' voices.

"It's the Pippinhill kids, all right," says I happily, when two boys of different ages came into sight around a corner of the house. And then did the other pair ever stare at us as we approached them through the weeds, Pancake, of course, still wearing his board saddle.

"We thought your old gray horse was a ghost," says the biggest boy, when we pulled up beside him.

"His name is Pancake," says Friday proudly.

"You ought to feed him in a few pancakes," laughed the kid, "and then his ribs wouldn't be so noticeable."

"Ribs are no disgrace," says Friday stiffly.

"How old is he?"

"Well," admitted Friday, "it's been several

years since he celebrated his tenth birthday."

"Yah; I guess so."

"Where's the coffee mill?" Friday then inquired.

"What coffee mill?"

"The one you were taking over to Mrs. Daniels."

"Who told you about it?" the kid eyed us suspiciously.

"Oh," says Friday, with an important gesture, "I'm a mind reader."

"That being the case," says the kid, "I won't need to tell you that the coffee mill is at the bottom of the old miser's well."

"*What?*" squeaked Friday, staring.

"Anyway," says the kid, sort of indifferent-like, "it had a broken cog in it."

Friday tore his hair.

"Oh, oh!" he moaned. "This is terrible."

I then explained to the Pippinhill kids about the lost teeth.

"Gosh!" says the oldest boy. "That's too bad."

We then went around the house and took a squint into the deep well. And *spooky?* I could tell, all right, that it had dark secrets.

"Maybe we can reach the coffee mill with

a rake," says the youngest Pippinhill kid, who, it seems, was the one who had accidentally dropped the mill into the well.

"You'd need a rake with an extension handle," says I, "to reach to the bottom of *that* well."

"How about going down a rope?"

"Talk to *him,*" says I, pointing to Friday. "For the teeth belong to his uncle."

"Go lay an egg," says Friday. "You'll never catch me going down a rope into that well."

"Don't be a quitter," I grinned. "You started out to get your uncle's teeth. So go ahead and finish the job."

Here the small Pippinhill kid came running with an old rake.

"Let's draw cuts," says he.

"What for?" says Friday.

"To see who goes down the well."

"Shucks!" says Friday, in a sudden burst of bravery. "You guys haven't the courage to do that."

And what do you know if he didn't swagger over to where old Pancake was trying nobly to digest a rose bush and start untying the long rope that held our board saddle in place.

"Crickets!" I cried, sort of admiring-like, when he returned to the well curb with the rope. "Are you really going to do it?"

"Nothing else but," says he heroically.

So we tied the rope under his arms. And taking the rake he told us to let him down easy, which we did, tying our end of the rope to a tree when he yelled to us to stop. We could hear the rake going swish! swish! swish! in the water, which, from where we were, looked as black as ink.

After a bit the worker gave a yip.

"Hot dog!" says he. "I've got it."

Hauled out of the well he handed me the dripping coffee mill.

"At last," says I, opening the drawer. And then I gave a squeal. For the only thing in the drawer was a box of bunion salve!

So now you know why I wrote down that Friday's uncle is an old dumb-bell. For only an old dumb-bell with wooden wheels in his head and a memory as big as a peanut would have let us chase all over the country after false teeth in a coffee mill drawer that weren't there at all.

There was some hot talk. And shoving the coffee mill at the puzzled Pippinhill kids we

retraced our steps to the road. I was pretty nearly starved. For it was evening, and I hadn't had a bite to eat since breakfast.

"Let's stop in town and fill up," says I weakly, as the Daniels farmhouse disappeared behind us.

Friday shook his head.

"If we turn south at the next corner," says he, "we won't need to go through town. And we'll cut off three miles."

I don't like to think of the awful time we had getting back to camp. Every time we passed a farmhouse old Pancake would lie down in the middle of the road, thinking, I guess, that he had reached his home sweet home. He was all tuckered out. And we had to rub him and pat him and almost kiss him to get him back on his feet. It came dark. Nor were we sure now that we were on the right road. So you can imagine what a relief it was to us when we spotted a camp fire up ahead of us.

Dragging ourselves into camp we heard an awful groan. It came from Uncle Jupe's side of the tent. He was groaning, I realized, because he was hungry.

"Poor Uncle Jupe," says I, sort of hushed-

like, when Slats and Tail Light came out of the tent.

Slats gave a snort.

"Don't waste your sympathy on him," says he.

"But he's hungry," says I.

"Hungry me eye," grunted Slats. "If you must know the truth he stole all our baked beans this afternoon and ate them. The biggest part of our boiled ham is gone, too."

I stared.

"But how could he eat," says I, "when he hadn't any teeth?"

"His teeth were in his big shoes," says Slats. "That's what made him limp."

Well, I don't know as there is any more to write down. What happened after that was mostly eating, with Friday and I seeing who had the biggest capacity.

## CHAPTER XIX

### BIG BUSINESS

October 4—Uncle Jupe groaned all night. Don't imagine, though, that he got any sympathy from us. I guess not! But when he begged us this morning to take him home so that he could see a doctor we hardly dared refuse. Anyway, we had to come home. For last night old Pancake pulled our tent down while we were asleep and chawed holes in it. The big dumb-bell! I'm beginning to think that he's more of a liability than an asset, or whatever you call it.

Never dreaming that we'd be home so soon my pa and my ma locked up the house this morning and drove over to Garnet Corners where they plan to spend the night. But I easily got into the house. And here I am all alone. Gee! I never realized before that our house could be so quiet and spooky-like. I have

a good notion to go over to Friday's house. Like old Uncle Jupe I could sleep in the bathtub, huh? I guess, though, I'm safe where I am. For burglars seldom stop in our town. And everybody knows there's no such thing as a ghost or spook.

School starts next Monday. And this afternoon, in preparation, Friday's ma took him downtown to the Hub and bought him some new school shirts. I dare say that I'll have some new shirts, too, when my ma and my pa get home from Garnet Corners. For that's where my ma does the most of her trading. I hate to think of going back to school. But I suppose it's necessary. Anyway, we had a longer vacation than most kids. And now that school is so close at hand I'm going to make that the subject of a new diary. That is, I'm going to end this diary Sunday night and start a new one Monday night.

Which reminds me that my first diary will soon be made up into a book. Gee! I wish my Uncle Ben would hurry up and get it printed. I want to see how it looks. I want to see the pictures, too. And, of course, as soon as it is printed I'll start earning royalties, which is the best part of all.

I tell you I'm lucky to have an uncle who is a book publisher. For while my diary stuff may be interesting, as my Uncle Ben says, I bet you that a million kids, if given the chance, could do as well. So I'm not going to get stuck on myself. For my good fortune, as I say, is largely a matter of luck. I realize that, all right.

Uncle Jupe went to bed the minute we got home this afternoon. But I have a hunch that as soon as he is well Mrs. Fish will help him dust off his umbrella and kiss him good-by. Which is the way she usually gets rid of him, Friday told me, when he and I were putting away our camping truck.

Figuring that he'd rather have the fourteen bucks than a four-legged responsibility, my chum later put up a sign in his front yard. Here it is:

**FOR SALE**

One gray horse by a boy with a beautiful mane and tail. Will eat anything, very fond of children. Good sound stomach with a bridle and yellow bathtub thrown in.

Oh, yes, I almost forgot to write down that Friday's pa has turned in the family chariot on a brand new Ford. I had a ride in it this

evening. It sure runs slick. Friday coaxed his pa to let him steer it. But Mr. Fish decided to do his own steering when we kissed a telephone pole in front of the slaughterhouse.

October 5—Can you imagine it, a mouse got into Friday's pa's new Ford last night and chawed a hole in one of the cushions. Which gave me an idea. And now, if the scheme that I have suggested to the Ford Motor Company goes through, I can see, all right, where we easily get rid of those blamed mouse traps. Here is a copy of the letter that I mailed this morning to Mr. Ford:

Dear Mr. Ford:

The green sedan that you sold to my pa with white wire wheels has a mouse hole in one of the cushions. I have mouse traps for sale. And I think you should furnish a mouse trap with each of your automobiles. That will save your customers from getting holes chawed in their cushions. If you will give me an order for six hundred mouse traps at two cents apiece I will ship them to you right away. And as an extra feature I will have them autographed by Trigger Berg, who is a famous author.

(Signed)

FRIDAY FISH.

Nor does Friday know that I signed his name to the letter. For why tell him until we get an order? If we *do* get an order he'll be tickled. And if we don't he need never know anything about it. As for signing the letter myself I didn't want Mr. Ford to get the idea that I'm stuck on myself. It's all right for Friday (supposedly) to call me a famous author. But I couldn't very well say that about myself.

I heard, though, that a lot of authors autograph their books. So it's a clever idea of mine, I think, to autograph the mouse traps. Maybe Mr. Ford will tell about it in his new catalog—how each of his automobiles has a mouse trap autographed by Trigger Berg, the famous author.

My pa and my ma blew in this afternoon, glad, of course, to see me, only my pa was kind of grouchy having had to stop on the road and repair a broken spring. Just as I anticipated, my ma brought me some new school shirts while she was in Garnet Corners. She bought me a new pink necktie, too, and a pair of brown corduroys.

August 6—Hot dog! I heard at Sunday

School this morning that school isn't going to start till Tuesday. Which gives us one more day of vacation.

Friday hasn't sold his horse yet. I guess there isn't mush of a demand for horses. As for Uncle Jupe, I saw him studying a map of the Fiji Islands this afternoon. So I guess he'll soon be leaving. I heard once that the Fiji Islands are inhabited by cannibals. But if he wants to run the chance of being parboiled it's nothing to me. It's my opinion, though, that he'd be blamed tough eating. Which reminds me of a bright one that Tail Light pulled in class to-day. Asked by the Sunday-school teacher if he knew what a cannibal was he shook his head. "Suppose you ate your father and mother," says the teacher, by way of example. "What would you be?" "An orphan," says Tail Light. And did we ever laugh!

October 7—Whoopee! My new book is here. My Uncle Ben sent me twenty copies. All alike. I gave a copy to each of my chums. Also I sent a copy to my Aunt Nellie and another to Pickles. I tell you I felt proud when I opened that package. For a minute or two, as the books came to sight, I couldn't say any-

thing. I was kind of struck dumb. Then getting my voice I let out a whoop that almost raised the roof. Coming on the run to see what had happened my ma was as tickled over the books as I was. She said she was proud of me; and she hugged and kissed me. But that was all right. Women act that way when they get excited.

Mr. Edwards, I see, has made a lot of changes in my diary. And I never realized before how punk my spelling was until I saw the new book. He has fixed up everything. And I'm glad. For now it's a *regular* book. It isn't a "kid" job at all. And the *pictures!* Oh, baby! I wish I could draw funny pictures like Mr. Salg.

I fooled around with my books all morning. First I laid them in a row on the floor, with the colored pictures turned up. Then when I got tired of looking at them that way I put them on a shelf. Later I put some of them in the parlor and some in the dining room. *My* books! I kept saying it over and over.

Finally, though, my ma told me to put the books away and go out and play. Friday and Slats were there. Ready to start for the schoolhouse, to see how the old shack looked

with its brand new wall, we stopped when Tail Light came on the run with a yellow paper.

It was a telegram from the Ford Motor Company!

"It's mine," I spoke quickly.

"Like so much mud," says Friday, showing me his name on the yellow envelope.

I told him then about the letter that I had written to Mr. Ford.

"You sure had your nerve," he scowled at me.

Slats hooked the envelope and ripped it open.

"Holy cow!" says he, in a kind of squeaky voice.

I looked over his shoulder. And here is what I read:

Friday Fish,
Crocketville, Ill.

Your proposition approved by our engineering staff. Order for six hundred million units being mailed to you. Start delivery at once.

(Signed)
FORD MOTOR COMPANY.

Six hundred million units!

"Good grief and pickled toenails!" I squeaked. "Does that mean that I've got to

autograph six hundred million mouse traps?"

"It says units," says Slats, looking kind of dazed. "But if you wrote to them about autographed mouse traps it must mean mouse traps."

"But it would take me ages to autograph *one* million mouse traps," I cried, "let alone six million mouse traps. Besides, we haven't got that many."

"We can buy more," says Slats.

"Did you make them a price?" says Friday quickly.

I nodded.

"How much?" he followed up.

"Two cents each."

He did some quick figuring.

"That's twelve million dollars for the complete job," says he.

Twelve million dollars!

"Catch me," I yipped, grabbing my hair. "I'm going to faint."

Slats studied the telegram. Then he turned to Tail Light, who was sitting on a stump eating licorice.

"Where did you get it?" he inquired.

"The Western Union man gave it to me," Tail Light wallowed his licorice around.

"And did he tell you that it's a real telegram?"

"Sure thing," Tail Light again refueled his big mug.

Slats gave me a queer look.

"It must be so," says he slowly. "But it's hard to believe."

I think Friday was as dizzy as I was.

"Twelve million dollars' worth of autographed mouse traps!" says he. "Wough!"

Then they hurried me over to the barn where the mouse traps were to see how fast I could do the autographing stuff.

"Ten per minute," says Friday, timing me.

"Which means six hundred an hour," says Slats.

"Or six thousand a day," says Friday, "if he works ten hours."

"But if we pay two cents for the mouse traps," says I, trying to collect my wits, "and sell them for two cents, what do I get out of it?"

"Exercise," grinned Slats.

Friday did some more figuring.

"Even if you work every day in the year," says he, "it'll take you two hundred and seventy-three years to fill the order."

"Help!" I squawked, clutching my head.

"Why not put in a thirteen-hour day?" says Slats.

There was some more figuring.

"That cuts it down to two hundred and ten years," says Friday.

Gosh! I was getting dizzier every minute.

"But I can't work all the time," I yipped.

"Of course not," Slats agreed. Then he turned to Friday. "Take off fifty-two Sundays," says he, "and one Christmas, one Fourth-of-July, one Thanksgiving, one birthday, one Sunday School picnic, one New Year's and fourteen days' vacation."

"Seventy-two days off," says Friday.

"Now figure it at thirteen hours a day," says Slats.

Which Friday did.

"Two hundred and sixty-two years," was his encouraging answer.

"Shut up!" I yelled, tearing my hair. "You're crazy. For how can I work two hundred and sixty-two years? People don't live that long."

"You've got to," says Slats, "or lose the order."

Here Mrs. Fish called to Friday and told him

to come into the house and answer the phone.

"It's a telegram," says she, wondering, I guess, why *he* should be getting telegrams.

Slats' eyes danced.

"Maybe Mr. Ford is going to double the order," says he hopefully.

My knees gave out.

"Take me to the hospital," I groaned.

And did I ever sweat! It's funny as I look back. But it wasn't funny to me then. I guess not! Boy, if you must know the truth, I was scared stiff.

Here's the message that Friday brought back:

> Friday Fish,
> Crocketville, Ill.
>
> Earlier telegram sent to you in error. Should have been addressed to concern manufacturing special patented lock washers. We are not interested in autographed mouse traps.
>
> (Signed)
> Ford Motor Company.

Thus saved from working two hundred and sixty-two years for nothing I thankfully staggered to my feet.

"Thank heaven!" says I.

Having come to this point in his diary, Trigger is naturally depressed by the thought of school with its enforced discipline and confinement. He sees less fun ahead and more responsibility. Little does he dream, though, of the amazing adventure that is about to befall him. . . . Confined to the village "pest house," under circumstances that will tax your giggling capacity, he and his pals, at midnight, listen breathlessly to those peculiar gliding footfalls on the back porch. Is it indeed a ghost? Tail Light is so scared that for once in his hungry life he stops eating. Then, as Slats (the hero!) slowly opens the door the eyes of the frightened quartet fall on a basket just without the door. "I beg of you to shield and protect my little precious until such time as I am able to call for him, for he is sacred to me," an accompanying note read in part. And there in the basket, swathed in the folds of a downy baby blanket, is a small spotted pig, from which this coming tale of shivers, squeals and belt-bursting giggles gets its title—*Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig.* You'll meet all the old "gang" in this coming fun-mystery story—Dynamite, Pancake, the yellow bathtub, Mrs. Camel, Charley Robin, Deacon Cullpepper and most important of all the complete Crooker gang. The fun piles up fast and furious as Tony's and Trigger's rival gangs battle for mastery in the guarded "pest house," first one side coming out ahead and then the other. Such pranks! And involved in the mystery is a peculiar detective, also confined to the "pest house." Truly one of the most promising fun-mystery-adventure tales that Leo Edwards has attempted. And it's coming soon!

# OUR CHATTER-BOX

OLD readers of my books (and this is Leo Edwards speaking) will require no explanation of what "Our Chatter-Box" really is. For I have explained the purpose of this department in several earlier volumes. But new readers are constantly entering our circle. And it is at these very welcome recruits that these few words of repeated explanation are directed.

In the first place let me say if you *are* a recruit, that I'm mighty glad to have you join our circle. And I hope, and the thousands of loyal fans standing back of me hope, that you will stick with us till, as some of the boys say, Niagara Falls.

Our goal is fun—good, clean, rollicking, skylarking fun. I have fun in mind in writing the Jerry Todd, Poppy Ott, Andy Blake and Trigger Berg books. And boys have fun in mind in reading these books. If you like fun you'll want to stick with us. For there's oodles of fun in the Jerry Todd and companion books that you haven't read, starting with *Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy, Poppy Ott and the Stuttering Parrot*, etc. And there's still more fun in the books that are coming.

I don't write boys' books simply to earn money. I write boys' books because I dearly love boys. I want to bring the right kind of fun into their lives, for fun is as necessary to a growing boy as beefsteak and potatoes. I want to inspire boys, too. I want to lift them up and keep them up. I want to see them headed into good, clean, honorable, industrious manhood. My boy pals! Thousands and thousands of them are scattered all over the country, in the crowded cities and the quieter countryside. And they are as sure of my enduring friendship as they are that the sun will rise tomorrow morning. I can't take all my boy pals by the hand—oh, how I wish I could! So you can see why this "pref-

ace'' or ''appendix'' department was created. It gives all of us a chance to speak up and get acquainted. For it is your department even more than it is mine.

Our first ''Chatter-Box'' was introduced in *Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem.* It was then explained that similar ''Chatter-Boxes'' would appear in all new Jerry Todd books. No mention was made of the Andy Blake books or these new Trigger Bergs. But you can see what happened! Instead of a few letters and contributions, I received hundreds. So why shouldn't we have a ''Chatter-Box'' in the Andy Blakes and Trigger Bergs as well as in the Jerry Todds and Poppy Otts? Personally, I'm tickled pink that so many of my good pals can be thus represented. Of course, I can't publish all the letters that I receive, though please be assured that I read and enjoy each and every one. But I'm going to try and publish all the interesting ones. And if you want to see your name in print, here's your chance. I have no favorites. If you will read this ''Chatter-Box'' carefully you'll see what I mean by ''interesting letters.'' You'll see, too, what other contributions are acceptable.

''Chatter-Box'' number one appeared in *Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem.* The second appeared in *Jerry Todd and the Bob-Tailed Elephant.* The third in *Andy Blake's Secret Service.* And the fourth in *Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree.*

If you have written me a letter, be sure and read these preceding ''Chatter-Boxes.'' For your letter may have been used. Then, too, if you want inside information on Jerry Todd, Poppy Ott, Scoop Ellery, Peg Shaw, Red Meyers and Leo himself—if you want to know if the story characters and places that I write about are real—by all means turn to these earlier books. There's a treat in store for you.

And now let's see what the boys have to offer this trip.

## LETTERS

I THINK 'our Chatter-Box' is a very good idea,'' writes Frank Fleming of Columbus, Ohio. ''I particularly enjoyed the article on story writing as it is my fondest desire to be an author some day. I also enjoyed the article about yourself.''

''In my room at school,'' writes Joe J. Chamberlain of Dayton, Ohio, ''almost all of the boys are Todd and Ott fans. And here's a joke on Red that I'd like to have you publish:

Red: ''I have electricity in my hair.''

Jerry: ''I thought so. For

your hair is connected to a dry cell."

"I had a birthday party the other day," writes Howard Harlan of La Grange, Ill. "And I got four of your books—which shows you that my friends know, all right, what I like best. And did I ever laugh when I read (in the *Bob-Tailed Elephant*) how Jerry and his gang put the hot-water bottle on Bingo's tummy."

And here's how William Devenney (alias Baron von Lentigo) of West Philadelphia, Pa., describes the latest in Freckled Goldfish: Self-stopper; fall-apart body; strip-easy gears; never-mesh clutch; 4-fin brakes; whirlwind motor (meaning the fish's tail); and, as drawn in his interesting letter, Bill refers to the "high hat" as a "fancy radiator cap." All clever stuff, if you were to ask me. With Rory Ringer in mind (one of Jerry's gang), Bill further describes himself as follows: "Hi'm 5 feet 5. Hi 'ave light 'air, blue heyes (with gray and green mixed hin) and Hi'm a beanpole. Hi like cocoanut custard pie hand Hi like swimming, boxing and reading."

"I induced my father," writes Herbert Traumuller of Brooklyn, N. Y., "to put aside his Conrad and Kipling in order to have him look over and read one of Jerry Todd's adventures. Later he gave as his opinion that the Jerry Todds are good books for me to read."

Thanks, Herb. And tell pop that I thank him, too.

Dear! dear! dear! What honors are tumbling in on us. For, can you imagine it, the next letter coming up for mention has UNITED STATES SENATE printed at the top. Willard C. Smith, the young writer (a Freckled Goldfish), who gives Washington, D. C., as his address, states that his father is secretary to Senator Henry D. Hatfield of West Virginia. Next, I suppose, we'll be getting a classy little letter from the President himself. Anyway, Willard, we're glad to learn that you are a Jerry Todd fan. And if you can induce your pa to induce Senator Hatfield to induce the President to pass a law allowing all hard-working authors a yearly pension of ten thousand bucks (or more) and plenty of soup and licorice, that will be lovely.

"Please put your autograph on my Freckled Goldfish membership card in ink," writes Harvey Ford of Erie, Pa., "as my hobby is collecting autographs of famous men."

Gee - miny - gee - whillikers-gosh-all-Friday! Are you trying to kid me, Harvey? *Me* famous! That's funny. If I weren't so blamed busy writing books I might try to become famous. But I reckon I'll never have the time.

"When I was reading the *Tittering Totem,*" writes Ross Montanari of Daytona Beach, Florida, "my pa said that I did more tittering than the totem pole itself. I enjoy your books so much that I am going to give the teacher one to read to the class when school opens again."

Hot dog! That's a bully good idea, Ross. And here's hoping that each scholar in the room laughs a million times.

"Some weeks ago," writes William J. Daly of West Philadelphia, Pa., "a boy who, in looks and actions, is a dead ringer for Red Meyers moved into our neighborhood. He's crazy about building lean-tos, underground dens and rafts. And does he ever get into scrapes! Trouble is his middle name. I thought you'd like to know, Mr. Edwards, that there are such *real* boys in the world."

"By the way," writes Freckled Goldfish Howard Burton of Sulligent, Ala., "how are your hens, parrots and cats getting along?"

Just now, Howard, I'm fooling around with a giant turtle, which enters prominently into *Poppy Ott and the Prancing Pancake.* The turtle's name is Davey Jones, and its owner's name (as given to the boys) is Sir Hinkle Funnyduster—only, of course, Rory Ringer (from England) calls the queer old man Sir 'Inkle Funnyduster.

And Frederick Wicke of Pensacola, Florida, is another boy who has a boat named "The Tittering Totem." A Freckled Goldfish, Fred advises that he buys the Jerry Todd books as fast as they come out. I'm wondering now if he'll see this mention of his name in a Trigger Berg book.

"As in your *Rose-Colored Cat* book," writes Fred Kupferer of Bronx, New York, "I and a pal of mine started a cat farm. It was our hard luck, though, that most of the cats escaped. So we had to quit."

And now see what a boner *I* pulled!

"If you will look on page 148 of *Jerry Todd in the Whispering Cave,*" writes Mark Hettinger of Dayton, Ohio, "you will find that it says that Jerry, Red and Scoop counted *bushels* of silver dollars, half dollars and quarters. Then on page 150 it says that Jerry put $4,388.88 (the complete find) in his pockets. Gee whizz! How big are his pockets? Regular elephant stuff, huh?"

I guess, Fred, that I was so excited when Jerry and his gang found the money that things looked bigger to me than they really were; and so I wrote accordingly. That's the only excuse I can offer.

"Two years ago," writes Henry K. Vye, Jr., of Cranston, R. I., "my father had

the mumps. While he was sick I read the *Whispering Mummy* to him. He liked it so well that we have read aloud all of your books. At the time we were reading the *Rose-Colored Cat,* we had a cat that we named Lady Victoria. She had two kittens that we named Jerry and Poppy. The new Andy Blake books are good and so are the Poppy Ott books. But I think the Jerry Todd books are the best. The books in which new characters are introduced are not (to my notion) quite equal to the old crowd in your first books. Take, for instance, Doc Leland, Bill Hadley, Cap'n Tinkertop and the boys of the old gang, and also the Stricker bunch—stories built around these characters are the best.''

A thing an author of series books must strive for, Henry, is new ideas. And in the development of new ideas we very often have to introduce new characters. But you can bet your boots that if we need a doctor in future Jerry Todd books old Doc Leland (a character taken from life) will not be overlooked. As for old Cap'n Tinkertop, it isn't at all improbable that he will appear in the job that I am working on now—*Poppy Ott and the Prancing Pancake.*

''Besides being full of fun,'' writes Eddie Smyth of New York City, N. Y., with reference to my books, ''I think they teach boys to be loyal to their pals and to have clean play.''

And if you think Eddie isn't some clever little artist you should see the free-hand character sketches that accompanied his letter. First of all is the Freckled Goldfish, pipe in its mouth, hat on its head, and everything. Jerry is shown wearing a skull cap. Red is all freckles and tousled hair. Other characters, very cleverly drawn, are Mrs. Warmley, Sidney Warmley, the Chinese dwarf and Professor Pipp—from the ''Freckled Goldfish'' book. Oh, yes, Poppy is there, too. Good old Poppy!

## SUGGESTIONS

I THINK it would be swell,'' suggests Jack Foster of Jamaica, Long Island, N. Y., ''if you put Cap'n Tinkertop in one of your latest books. Make it appear as though the old man had turned against Jerry and his gang. Later the boys suspect the Cap'n of having robbed Scoop's father's store. The Cap'n disappears. The boys go to Oak Island for a short camping trip. In the dead of night Jerry goes for a stroll along the shore. He sees a form among the trees. Red, of course, wants to clear out for home, etc. You can work out the rest yourself.''

"I would suggest," writes George W. Leseman of Green Cove Springs, Florida, "that you ask Bert Salg to give Jerry and his pals long pants, as most boys of their age wear long pants. I want to tell you, too, about a tree house that my gang rigged up in the top of a huge oak. A road passed under the tree. Pretending that another gang of boys were our enemies, we collected a lot of rotten tomatoes, etc. When the rival gang came down the road, singing and laughing, we got ready to sock them. Alas, though, one of our boys skidded on a rotten tomato, upsetting our whole pile of ammunition on top of the surprised enemy, who thought, I guess, that a whole garden was falling on them. Last Xmas I gave one of my pals *Jerry Todd and the Purring Egg*. Later the book came up missing. In searching for it my pal heard his father in the attic. Such giggling! Yah, you guessed it—pa was up there reading about the million-dollar (?) dodo egg."

"Here's my suggestion," writes Harry Watson of Camden, N. J. "A circus comes to town. A tiger escapes. Jerry and his gang can have thrills and fun capturing it."

Yet, Harry, how tragic, if, in the capturing process, poor Red got a hunk bit out of the seat of his pants. Or would you further suggest that we supply Red and his doughty companion tiger catchers with tin pants?

"The three 'Oak Island' books (*Jerry Todd and the the Oak Island Treasure, Jerry Todd in the Whispering Cave* and *Jerry Todd, Pirate*) are the ones I like best," writes John D. McKian of Chicago, Ill. "I would suggest, though, that you have Jerry and his gang build a stronghold on the island. Maybe a rude cabin, protected by rocks, or a stockade. It would be a good place for them to 'battle' the Strickers; and a regular siege by the enemy would be a good episode for one of your books. If left to me, I would locate the stockade on the island's highest point. It would need a gate (or some kind of a drawbridge), and loopholes should be provided for Jerry's warriors' slingshots. There should be a lookout tower, too."

"It would be swell, I think," suggests John Geidel of Lac du Flambeau, Wisc., "if you could supply felt pictures of Jerry and Poppy for readers to put on the front of their sweaters."

Thanks, John, not only for the suggestion, but for the booklet describing your father's lodge. Rest assured that I'm going to drop in on you some day.

"I have only one criticism to make of your books," writes Kenny Chenoweth of

Jacksonville, Ill. "To my notion they should have a fat boy in them. You see, I'm fat myself, and I like it. I don't get cold in the winter, and can stay in swimming longer than the other fellows because my fat keeps me warm. Then, too, a fat boy can eat more, because his skin stretches."

## POEMS

LEARNING that I would publish original poems, boys began writing poetry. Some of it was good. Some of it wasn't. Some was even worse than that. I'm still getting poems. I suppose I'll continue to get them for years to come. So I hasten to state that my original promise holds good. If you, as a reader of my books (whether you like them or not!) can write an original poem that we will be glad to publish, your reward will be an autographed copy of the particular book in which your "masterpiece" appears.

Robert B. Sanford of 3810 Farragut Rd., Brooklyn, N. Y., believes in being original. Here is the way he applied for membership in our Freckled Goldfish lodge:

From all I hear the Lodge is great;
I'd like to be a member.
I hope my plea is not too late—
And gets there 'fore December.

This poem (or would you call it a song without music?) was written by Thomas English, 143 No. 62nd St., Philadelphia, Pa.:

There was a little Dutchman,
His name was Jerry Todd—
A dealer in dogs and sauerkraut.
He made the finest sausages
That ever you have seen,
Until one day he invented
A wonderful slicing machine.

CHORUS:

Oh, Mr. Jerry Todd,
How could you be so mean?
I told you you'd be sorry
For inventing that machine.
Now all of Tutter's cats and dogs
Will never more be seen.
For they'll be ground to sausages
In that wonderful slicing machine.

One day Scoop went walking—
He walked right in the store;
He bought a pound of sausages
And piled them on the floor.
He whistled and he whistled—
He whistled up a tune,
And all the little sausages
Went dancing round the room.

One day the thing got busted—
The blamed thing wouldn't go;
So Jerry Todd he climbed inside
To see what made it so.
Peg, who got the nightmare
From walking in his sleep,
Gave the crank a heck of a yank,
And Jerry Todd was meat.

And Ralph Mohat, of 538 No. Prospect St., Marion, Ohio, tells me that he sat up all night (almost!) writing this one:

Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott
Liked each other an awful lot.
They bought pickles—oh, galore!
Hundreds and hundreds and maybe more.
Sold them at Poppy's Pickle Parlor,
Taking in money, dollar upon dollar.

Then there began the mystery
Of vanishing cats, I believe there were three.
Also there was a gold cucumber,
Valuable because of the number
Of similar ones that it led to,
When they'd studied its secret through and through.

A secret door, cave and passageway,
Not penetrated by the light of day—
Jerry and Poppy discovered them all,
After hearing strange sounds through the basement wall,
Of an old stone house that was very queer,
Built long ago by Peg-leg Weir.

To enjoy this book you must read it through,
The pages number two-forty-two.
Read it! Read it! And don't forget
You'll laugh one minute, the next you'll sweat.
You've guessed its title I'll bet two nickles.
Of course! It's *Poppy Ott's Pedigreed Pickles.*

Which, *I* think, is a corking good poem for a boy. And I'm glad to reward Ralph with an autographed copy of this book. Also he brings up an interesting point. "I have read all of the Jerry Todd books," he writes, "but never have discovered Peg's real name. What is it?"

And the answer is—David N. Shaw.

Here's another good one from Alfred Leeds, 490 Rahway Ave., Woodbridge, N. J.

*Harrool Harbars and His Trip to Mars*

There was a young man named Harrool Harbars

Who thought he would take
a trip to Mars,
And pass the clouds and some
of the stars.
"To-day," he said, "I'll
make a flying machine,
The fastest kind that ever
was seen."

He worked and worked from
morn till night,
Until the airplane was just
right.
Without telling a soul he
made ready for flight.
He said: "I want to see
the man in the moon,
And hope I arrive in Mars
pretty soon."

"I wonder what I'll find up
there
After traveling through the
air?
I bet I'll give the people of
Mars a scare.
I'll tell them I came from
down below
Where people have autos
and radio."

"I'll tell them down here we
have lots of fun,
And ask them if they ever
saw a gun.
I'll tell them the famous
words: 'I do not choose
to run.'
Pretty soon I'll know the
mystery of Mars."
So thought the hero, Har-
rool Harbars.

He went in the machine and
flew away,
Traveling upward till break
of day.

"Oh! There is Mars!" he
shouted. "Hoo-ray!"
But as he neared he for-
got his jubilation
For he knew he'd be
wrecked because of
gravitation.

If he hit the ground his
plane would smash
And, most likely, he'd be at
the bottom of the crash.
He heard a voice and recog-
nized it in a flash.
It was his mother. She
said: "Get out of bed,
Harrool,
Or else you will be late for
school."

Henry K. Vye Jr., 846 Park Ave., Cranston, R. I., sends us this one:

*The Freckled Goldfish*

What's a Freckled Goldfish,
you ask me—
It isn't a cow or a horse;
and it surely isn't a flea.
Now what can it be?

It isn't a fish made of gold;
It wasn't freckled by the
sun, we are told;
If it was it was very bold.

Where is this remarkable
fish, hear people mutter,
We tell them it is a resident
of Tutter—
The town where people know
their onions and butter.

After all the facts had been
washed in a tub,

It was decided upon a Goldfish club,
For which there never will be a sub.

Everybody wants to become a member
So that they can remember
That they belong to the greatest club between Jan. and Dec.

MORE LETTERS

I AM a Boy Scout,'' writes Billy Jay of Richmond, Ind., ''and fond of the outdoors. Last summer (1928), I went to Culver summer camp and took my whole set of Jerry Todd. Is Tutter a real town? My gang has a club house on So. 19th St. Boy, we have fun there! We slept there one night and nearly got eaten up by bugs.''

Also, Bill states that he likes to be sick—imagine a boy saying that!—for then he can read to his heart's content. Some bookworm, I'll say. As for the ''low-down'' on Tutter, turn to our first ''Chatter Box'' in *Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem* and you'll get the whole story.

''Isn't it odd that in the *Rose-Colored Cat* book the woman who owned the valuable cat had the same name as mine,'' writes Freckled Goldfish James Kepple of Greensburg, Pa. ''I wish I had pals like Jerry Todd, Al Moore and Peg Shaw. The first time I come up your way I'm going to make Jerry and his pals take me to Oak Island, the brickyard, old Cap'n Tinkertop's house and a few other places. Maybe we'll even go camping—hey? I have two bantam hens, two dogs, a canary and I just sold five Guinea pigs. I had six dogs but I sold four of them. I wish I could have been with Jerry in the *Pirate* book. I'd like to sock Bid Stricker with a rotten egg.''

James further writes that he has induced several of his pals to join our Goldfish lodge; which is fine. And it *is* odd, James, that your name matches the character you mention. For I never heard the name until I ''made it up.''

''I expect to name my boat 'The Tittering Totem,' '' writes Ross Strout, Washington, D. C. ''And I further intend to rig up a slingshot cannon on the boat (like in *Jerry Todd, Pirate*) and play pirate.''

Hot dog! I bet Ross and his gang have fun. He concludes by saying: ''Give Bid Stricker a black eye for me.''

''I had a black tomcat named Jinx,'' writes John William Frost of Pleasantville, N. Y. ''I found the cat in a field. He was crying, so I took him home and kept him—even though my pa

kicked when he found that I had used his favorite sofa cushion for a cat bed. Then one day Jinx disappeared. Mother heard him crying in the house, but we couldn't find him. Hunter (the baby) was sick upstairs and mother heard him talking to the cat. One night I woke up. I heard the clock strike three. The window of my room was open. I looked across, and there, on the window sill, was Jinx! His back was hunched and his tail stuck straight up. Rubbing my eyes I looked again. Jinx was gone! When I told mother the next morning she said I had eaten too many cheese sticks.''

Br-r-r-r! What you really saw, John, was a ghost, Jinx evidently having fallen through a knot-hole or something. Have your father tear up all the floor boards in the house. No doubt you'll find a pile of cat bones. Bury the bones (preferably under a gooseberry bush) and Jinx will haunt you no more.

''Your books have one outstanding fault,'' writes Laurence S. Critchell of New York City, N. Y. ''They give a fellow heartache from laughing.''

What is your recommendation, Laurence?—that we include a box of anti-pain pills with each book sold?

And how I laughed when I read Roy Vollckel's letter (he lives in Cicero, Ill.) which concludes with: ''Ta-ta, old salt and pepper.''

''My father is president of Duke University,'' writes Freckled Goldfish Kendrick Few of Durham, N. C. ''I have a good time watching the work on the new campus which is now being built, to be finished in 1932. About $40,000,000 is being spent on it now. I like your books very much and wish you would write more of them.''

''Here, too,'' advises Alvin Leudesdorf of Brooklyn, N. Y., whose name (together with that of his chum, Norman Stack) should be included in the list of boys who now own boats christened ''The Tittering Totem.''

Also Robert Witte of Ridgewood, N. J., has a boat by that name—a toy boat, as I understand it. Next, he reports, he and his cousin are going to tackle a totem pole.

Which reminds me that I have here on my desk a snapshot of a totem pole (a peachy-looking one, too) carved by Henry Birkenhauer of Toledo, Ohio.

''As Freckled Goldfish No. 1357,'' writes Henry, ''I thought I would notify you that I have carved a totem pole after the pattern of Red's. I can sympathize with Red and Rory for the razzing they got. The boys who viewed my work said much the same thing.''

Also Henry contributes a poem. Here it is:

*The Race*

A smart rich kid lived in our town,
He had a "skimmer" fleet,
He thought he was the cat's meow
And all boats his could beat

But Poppy Ott and Jerry got
A faster boat. Oh, gee!
They beat the rich kid seven ways,
And from town he did flee.

"I have many freckles, like Red Meyers," writes Robert Irwin of Wollaston, Mass., "but no red hair. I'm mighty glad the freckle specialist (in *Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish*) didn't come to Wallaston and try his freckle mud on me."

PICTURES

NOT only have I a picture of Stanley D. Russell of New York City, N. Y., but accompanying the picture is a long letter in which Stan gives a very interesting account of a Boy Scout hike, in which he and his chums, all Boy Scouts, had a merry time with two rafts. In the end the boys succeeded in dumping the Scoutmaster from his raft into the water. In the picture Stan is wearing his Scout suit and he states that he is thirteen years old.

Also I received a full-length picture of Marvin Weissburg of Chicago, Ill. Marvin says that the picture was taken after a "tough" game of tennis. He signs his letter your admirer, pal, chum and buddy—which suits me fine.

Next comes a picture of a dandy pal, Mackinaw, mittens, high-tops, pull-down cap and all (not overlooking the snow banks) who responds to the name of Norman Peschko, and who lives in York, Pa. He says: "I decided to write you a friendly letter instead of a formal one." You made a good guess, Norman. I don't care for formal letters. I want boys to write to me just as they would write (or talk) to one another. As for misspelled words and junk like that—Shucks!—I never see it.

And here's a dandy picture from Teddy Johnson of Longmeadow, Mass. Or should I have said a picture (I can see a most pleasing rustic cottage in the background) of a dandy boy? Ted reports that the picture was taken at a summer camp in his state.

And how very "official" Richard W. Spiro looks in his captain's cap. Living in Tuckahoe, N. Y., he says the picture (he's in his summer togs) was taken in Asbury Park, N. J.

Also I have a picture of Wayne D. Jones, Jr., Phoenixville, Pa. He looks very studious as he sits with a book open in front of him.

And from James McAnally of Philadelphia, Pa., comes a picture of six fine-looking boys, with the writer and his chum, Harry Reed, in the front row. James writes: "From left to right are Polish, Irish, German, English, with German and Irish in front."

And just to prove that he can pose twice and look like a he-boy in both pictures, Bob Shaw of Milwaukee, Wisc., sends me two snapshots of himself. It's hard to believe, though, that he has as many freckles (he's a Freckled Goldfish) as he says. To my notion he's a pretty swell-looking kid.

Does Henry Baumann of Springfield, N. Y., wear long pants? Sure thing. I have proof right here in front of me in the way of a snapshot. Henry is in his shirt sleeves. He forgot to comb his hair. But his grin is wonderful!

"The boys in our neighborhood have a lot of fun in Summer," writes Eugene Kaufman of Amarillo, Texas. "Right now I have a tent in our back yard where I and another boy sleep nights. It sure is fun. Further, we have three cherry trees in the yard. Also peach trees. Umyum!"

Accompanying Eugene's letter are two pictures, one of himself and his dog Smoky (it's hard to tell which is the best looking!) and another of the dog alone.

In sending me his picture, E. Preston Stover of Ivyland, Pa., tells me that he is going to be a yacht owner when he grows up. He's ten now; a fine-looking little chap; with a studious look, too—or is that book spread out in front of him a Jerry Todd?

Thanks, Preston. When you get that yacht please give me a ride. Then we'll both have fun.

A boy and his dog! That would be a good title for the picture I have here of John Palmer of Warrenville, Ill. A husky lad is John, with high-tops and everything. So that there will be no confusion he tells me in his letter that "he" is the one with the sweater. Honest, though, I had that figured out even before I read his letter.

During the time that I was in Florida (from December, 1928, to April, 1929), a number of Jerry Todd fans sent me their pictures at Cambridge. My boy Beanie handled all the letters for me. In a few cases he forgot to send me the pictures that certain boys enclosed with their letters, so I have here on my desk a number of pictures that I can't

identify. I find myself wondering who the boy is in the bathing suit, standing beside an old gentleman with a pipe in his mouth. And here's a picture of two boys, one has glasses and the other is wearing a sport sweater. Both good-looking lads—but who are they! In another picture, two boys are having a scrap; and again one of these boys is shown in a separate picture. Um . . . Wish I was that good-looking. On the back of the picture I see the name Edward Krajewski. Thanks, Ed. There's still another picture from a boy named Howard something-or-other—the picture is autographed but I'm in doubt about the last name.

Then, in a later mail, I received a corking good picture from Kay Cohn, Madison, Wisc. Kay is standing in a representative Wisconsin snow bank. I might add that later I met this new pal of mine and found him to be a most pleasing boy. Thanks for the picture, Kay. Hope I'll see a lot of you.

And in final comes a picture of Roy J. Strauss of Brooklyn, N. Y. Roy's old "Pirate" club is now an up-and-coming Freckled Goldfish club. If the other sixteen members of the club are as peppy as Roy appears to be in his picture I bet they have fun.

## MORE LETTERS

"YOU should see the totem pole I made," writes Edward Hooper of Catonsville, Md. "It looks so cockeyed dumb that it would scare a monkey into thinking he was good looking."

And I have a letter from a boy, Robert A. Duffy, Jr., Philadelphia, Pa., who has a birthday only once in four years, having been born on the 29th of February. Poor Bob! Only one birthday cake in four years. Somebody page Red Meyers!

And Meyer Cohen of Medford, Mass., wants to know if he can join our Freckled Fishbone club!

Here is a letter from a boy of seventeen, in high school, who admits that he still reads (and enjoys) the Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott books.

"Before your books came out," writes William McClenahan of Brooklyn, N. Y., "I read Edgar Rice Burroughs' books, because I like an author with good imagination. But when I got hold of your *Mummy* book, and got introduced to Jerry and his gang, I saw in you an author with an imagination even exceeding Mr. Burroughs'. As I am interested in aviation, and hope to be a pilot some day, I would like to see Jerry and his gang 'up in the air' in one of your books, if your imagination can put them there.

My uncle is just as crazy about Jerry as I am and as soon as I finish a Todd book he reads it. My aunt has complained to me that she can't get my uncle to bed when I lend him a Todd book, as he giggles his way through the book unmindful of the passing hours. So you see I'm not the only one in our family entertained by you. Now, I would like to surprise my uncle. He hasn't as yet read the *Freckled Goldfish* book and consequently knows nothing about your Secret and Mysterious Order of the Freckled Goldfish. So will you please send him (you'll find his address on the following page) a membership card?''

''I would like to know what became of Tom Ricks, Tom Weir and Al Moore,'' writes Walter Willard of Highland Park, Ill.

Well, Walt, I've often wondered myself what became of Tom Ricks and Aunt Polly. I thought that Tom and his aunt (and Mr. Ricks, too) were pretty good stuff when I was writing about them. I imagine that Tom went away to school; anyway, let us assume that he did. And Tom Weir and Al Moore, too.

''From beginning to end,'' writes George H. Scheffey of Royersford, Pa., with reference to my books, ''the reader does nothing but laugh and laugh. I put up all my other books as a prize to anyone who will not laugh when he reads your books, old grouches included. Sometimes my parents say if I keep on reading so much I will go out of my mind. So one day I begged my dad to read one of your books; and it was understood that if he didn't approve of it I would stop reading them. When he finished the one I gave him he started right in on the others until he read the whole of the Jerry Todds as far as the *Pirate* book and all of the Poppy Otts as far as the *Freckled Goldfish.* He even read the two Andy Blakes. And then he urged me to read the rest and let him read them, too. So please enter my name in your big book and send me my Freckled Goldfish membership card.''

I'm mighty glad, George, that pop put the seal of approval on my books. For while the plots are rather ''spooky'' in spots, and probably help to stir up exciting dreams, I always try to have my boys (and I'm speaking now of Jerry and his pals) do what is right. If you will follow in Jerry's footsteps, your parents need never doubt your manly behavior. For Jerry is too honorable to cheat; too thankful for his strong, vigorous body to abuse it; and too grateful for his honorable name to besmirch it.

"I like your Poppy Ott books very much," writes Morton Greenwald of Philadelphia, Pa. "They have given my pal and me ideas. Recently we made stilts (patterned after Poppy's) and started a craze in our neighborhood."

"I'm crazy about Poppy and Jerry," writes Leonard Overby of Burlington, N. C., in applying for membership in our Freckled Goldfish lodge. "Won't you please put my name in a book on Jerry's side?"

Leonard, any boy anywhere, who is on the square, is on Jerry's side.

"When I was sick," writes Joe Kingsley, Jr., Haysville, Pa., "your books amused me very much. Gee, it seems as though I know you like I know my own father."

Which is a bully good compliment, Joe, and I thank you for it. I want more boys to "know me like their own father." For I try to be a true-blue pal to every boy with whom I come in contact.

"I like the characters in your books so much," writes Douglas P. MacVane of Portland, Maine, "that I insist on my friends calling me Poppy."

"Is there such a thing as the Secret Order of Humpty-Dumpty, the Rejuvenated Egg?" writes Tom Plumb of Rochester, N. Y. "If so, I would like to join it, too (as well as the Freckled Goldfish club), as an honorary member. Also tell me this: If Poppy Ott is Jerry's bosom pal, why doesn't he figure in Jerry's books?"

Tom further states that he has read none of the Poppy Ott books; had he done so he would have known that Poppy is indeed Jerry's bosom pal. But— Both boys are leaders; so it would seem advisable not to bring Poppy into the Todd books for fear he might dominate them; and it wouldn't seem natural to have him in a story where he didn't take a leading part.

"Some of your older readers," writes Gaines Augustus of Durant, Miss., "would appreciate it if you wrote some real mystery stories for them, as they have outgrown Jerry Todd."

Which brings up a point that I would like to touch on briefly. The Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott books were written (and are still being written) for boys ranging between the ages of nine and fourteen. Instead of "growing up" with my readers, I am going to keep on writing small-boy books, getting the interest and attention of a new group of small boys each year. In other words, as long as I write about Jerry and his gang they are going to be small boys. But the Andy Blake books are for older boys. Had you thought of that, Gaines?

Have you read any of the Andy Blake books? If not, try one and see how you like it. There is a very definite mystery in *Andy Blake's Secret Service.*

"Having read the *Talking Frog* book," writes Robert E. Widdis of Worchester, Mass., "I'm convinced that both you and Clara Bow have 'it.' How many boys belong to the Freckled Goldfish club? How many letters do you receive from boys?"

Well, Bob, you may be right in your statement that I have some of Clara's "it." But I hasten to assure you that so far as the red hair is concerned she and Red Meyers have it all. My hair is sprinkled with gray and I have it cut with a hole in the top. Our Goldfish club now totals more than 4,000 members. I was in Florida four months recently and during that time my son handled more than 1,200 pieces of mail for me, of which 889 were letters from boy pals.

"We have a big woods near my home," writes Henry Baumann of Springfield, N. Y., "where we catch garter snakes. When we see one we chase it into a corner and then (gently!) we pick it up by the neck and put it in a sack, after which we place it with others in a big enclosure filled with moss, stones, leaves, etc. Our mothers don't like the idea very well. I'd like to know if any other boys do anything like we do with snakes."

Br-r-r-r! I never did like snakes. So, Henry, you and your gang can have 'em all.

## FRECKLED GOLDFISH

IN 1928 we organized a club called the Secret and Mysterious Order of the Freckled Goldfish. To-day we have more than 4,000 members in our club.

Here is how the idea originated: I had just written a book called *Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish.* In the book Poppy and Jerry get up a "lodge" called the Freckled Goldfish. Boy pals of mine, who read the manuscript before it was turned over to the publisher, asked me eagerly if they could get up a local lodge patterned after Poppy's.

Which gave me an idea. Why not get up a club, of national scope, open to all Poppy Ott and Jerry Todd fans everywhere?

So we went ahead on that line. We had membership cards printed; and we bought a big book in which to record the names and addresses of all members. Announcing the club in the preface of the "Goldfish" book, we soon heard from boys wanting to join. And now, as I say, we have a very large (and still growing) membership list.

The club is purely a

"fun" proposition. There are no dues (except as required in local chapters); and the responsibilities are light. If you have a kindly feeling toward Poppy, Jerry, Andy and Trigger—the leading characters in my various series of books—you are eligible to join.

Mr. Bert Salg, the popular illustrator of these books, designed the membership card, which contains a comical picture of Poppy's Freckled Goldfish, together with the general rules and regulations—all printed on the card. Then, too, each card contains my own personal autograph.

Any boy anywhere, of any age, size or color, can join. It will cost you four cents in stamps—four one-cent stamps or two two-cent stamps. One red stamp will pay the postage on your membership card; and the other red stamp will partly cover the cost of the envelope and the illustrated card.

In applying for membership please observe these simple rules:

(1) Print your name plainly.
(2) Supply your complete (printed) address.
(3) Give your age.
(4) Enclose two two-cent stamps—or four one-cent stamps.
(5) Address your letter to,
Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

## LOCAL CHAPTERS

DOZENS of boys asked me if they might organize local chapters as a part of our international Freckled Goldfish lodge. Permission was granted in all cases; but I was unfortunate in being unable to give these boys much help in the organization of such chapters.

But now we have a printed ritual which any boy who wants to start a Freckled Goldfish club in his own neighborhood can't afford to be without. This booklet tells how to organize the club, how to conduct lodge meetings, how to transact all club business, and, probably most important of all, how to initiate candidates.

The complete initiation is given word for word. Naturally these booklets are more or less secret. So, if you send for one, please do not show it to anyone who isn't a Freckled Goldfish. The initiation will fall flat if the candidate knows what is coming. Three chief officers will be required to put on the initiation, which can be given in any boy's home, so, unless each officer is provided with a booklet, much memorizing will have to be done. The best plan is to have three booklets to a lodge. These may be secured (at cost) at six cents each (three two-cent stamps) or three for

sixteen cents (eight two-cent stamps).

Address all orders to,
Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

## CLUB NEWS

I HAVE read my new Goldfish ritual and think it's great,'' writes Thomas Dugan of South Hadley Falls, Mass. ''We are going to have a club meeting to-night in my attic. To raise money we are going to hold a boxing match. We have four members and our dues are ten cents a month.''

''I'm going to tell you how we distribute circulars telling about the Freckled Goldfish club around Springfield,'' writes Henry Baumann of New York state. ''We print a note telling how good the club is and how to join it. This note we fold and weight with paper clips. Also clips are used to fasten the note to the kite. When the kite is high enough the wind pressure releases the note (sometimes!) and it drops into some kid's yard or on the street where it is picked up and read. Result —another member. The arrangement which releases the note is an invention of my pal Carter Tedford and myself.''

Get it patented, Henry! If you don't, the first thing you know some enterprising coal company will cop your idea. For that would be a swell way to deliver coal, providing the coal landed in the right yard. How awkward, though, if the operator pulled the release string at the wrong moment and the coal took a swipe at somebody's sun parlor.

''The members of our Goldfish chapter all thank you for those rituals,'' writes Francis W. Smith of Chambersburg, Pa. ''Boy, they sure are swell! We all have pins made in the shape of a shield on which are the letters F. G. C.—meaning, of course, Freckled Goldfish Club.''

''Dear Jerry Todd,'' writes Arthur Mikol of Los Angeles, Calif. ''I would like to join your lodge. May I? What I like about your gang is the way you act. I wish I was with you. In your *Pirate* book I was scared to death in the chapter, 'The House of Strange Secrets.' Gee! I did not like to go to bed that night because I knew I would dream about it. I was just like you were in the house. It was the spookiest book I ever read.''

''We hope to have the best organized pool under your management,'' writes George Carter of St. Albans, N. Y. ''This chapter recently elected officers as follows:

James Ritterbusch, Gold Fin.

George Carter, Silver Fin.
Howard Carter, Freckled Fin.
Lawrence Olds, Right Gill.
Ralph Darnell, Left Gill.''

Jimmy Everinghim of New York City, N. Y., is one of the boys who organized a Goldfish chapter even before our ritual was printed.

''We made up our own laws and initiation,'' writes Jim. ''We do many things in our club such as radio experiments and electric work. But the thing we work on the most is advertising for the Carbona Products Co.''

''I have worn out my Freckled Goldfish card carrying it around in my pocket,'' writes Harvey Travis of Endicott, N. Y. ''So please send me another. I like the crazy old professors and scientists that you have in your books, as, for instance, Mr. Arnoldsmith in the *Whispering Mummy,* Professor Stoner in the *Rose-Colored Cat,* Mr. Ricks in the *Talking Frog* and Professor Clatterby in the *Whispering Cave.* Al Pearsall is my best pal and we try to be as much like Jerry and Poppy as possible. Recently we got hold of an old organ, just like Jerry in the *Oak Island Treasure.* We were too curious, though, to see its insides. And having put it together (we had enough parts left over to make another organ), it didn't sound so good. Having organized a local Goldfish chapter we call ourselves 'Stuttering Parrots.' Our password is: 'H-h-ham. I k-k-killed Ham. B-b-blood. Gu-g-give me a bucket of b-b-blood.''

''May girls, too, belong to the Freckled Goldfish club?'' writes Ester Frances Swift of Wellsville, Ohio. ''I play Indian, cowboy, marbles, baseball, football, and all such games. The boys like to have me play with them. So before denying me membership, please think the matter over carefully.''

Well, Ester, if the boys enjoy having you on their football and baseball teams, I can think of no reason why you shouldn't be admitted to our secret lodge. But in playing with your gang of boys, please promise me that you won't get rough with them and bend them out of shape.

''Around here,'' writes Ruth Reiders of New York City, N. Y., ''my brother and his pals are all Freckled Goldfish. They hold meetings, too, and each member has a name that you originated.''

''Of all your books, the one I like best is *Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog,*'' writes Robert MacMillan of New Rochelle, N. Y. ''I like the part where Mr. Matson's ghost takes the talking frog and Jerry's chums suspect the queer old soap man. I have a barn in my yard the same as Red Meyers and on

the top floor I am having my new Goldfish club.''

''I received my membership card a few weeks ago,'' writes Eddie Smyth of New York City, N. Y., ''and like it very much. I think the rules are swell and I have carried them out to the best of my ability. I have read your 'Chatter-Box' and I enjoy it very much. Couldn't you get up a sort of five-cent weekly or monthly paper to mail to all boys who wish to read it? Maybe you could publish short stories in it and make a small magazine of it.''

I'm far too busy, Eddie, to attempt a job like that.

''My brother Pat and I want to join the Freckled Goldfish club,'' writes Morgan Jones of Kansas City, Mo. ''One is twelve and the other thirteen. When I read the Jerry Todd books I laugh out loud. And then my parents want to know what's wrong. Please write some more about Jerry Todd.''

Well, Morgan (and Pat, too), I am glad you're getting fun out of my books. I like to hear boys laugh. And the harder they laugh when they read my books the better I like it. So the next time you read a Jerry Todd book (and rest assured that I shall write many more of them), whoop it up. If you jar the roof loose and mom and pop get huffy about it, send me the bill—and I'll put the bill on ice and let the sun settle it.

''I have a friend who is not a Freckled Goldfish but who wants to be very much, so I am sending in his name,'' writes Jack Cunningham of Hartford, Conn. ''A few days ago my teacher asked me what writer lived in Cambridge. I said: 'Leo Edwards.' And she said: 'Wrong. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.' But I was right in a way. One of my friends has a wagon and he named it 'The Galloping Snail.' ''

Which is all for this time. And what a long ''Chatter-Box'' it is! Maybe you think it is too long. I'll be glad to have you write and tell me what you think about it.

# This Isn't All!

Would you like to know what became of the good friends you have made in this book?

Would you like to read other stories continuing their adventures and experiences, or other books quite as entertaining by the same author?

On the *reverse side* of the wrapper which comes with this book, you will find a wonderful list of stories which you can buy at the same store where you got this book.

## *Don't throw away the Wrapper*

*Use it as a handy catalog of the books you want some day to have. But in case you do mislay it, write to the Publishers for a complete catalog.*

# BOOKS BY LEO EDWARDS

**Illustrated. Every Volume Complete in Itself.**

Hundreds of thousands of boys who laughed until their sides ached over the weird and wonderful adventures of Jerry Todd and his gang demanded that Leo Edwards, the author, give them more books with belt-bursting laughs and creepy shivers. So he took Poppy Ott, Jerry Todd's bosom chum and created the Poppy Ott series. Now there are two more series, The Andy Blake and the Trigger Berg—and if such a thing is possible—they are even more full of fun and excitement than the Jerry Todds.

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JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG
JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG
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